

**Contextual Reading of Psalm 22 with Special Reference to  
Indian Christian Dalit Interpretations**

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**A thesis submitted to the University of Edinburgh for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**



## Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis constitutes my own research and writing, and it has not been submitted in any previous application for a degree. All quotations have been distinguished and the sources of the information acknowledged.

Jesurathnam, J

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis endeavours to place Indian Christian Dalit interpretations of Psalm 22 in conversation with the historical critical, Early Christian and modern Christian interpretations. This conversation is meant on the one hand to examine how Dalit interpretation shares common things with its conversation partners and on the other hand to demonstrate that in spite of the presence of common interpretative elements between the two Dalit interpretations show certain features of Psalm 22 that are distinct to its own context. These distinct features are identified so that the Dalit interpretation can challenge its non-Dalit partners and also enrich their understanding of Psalm 22.

In the Indian context biblical interpretation was dominant in the past two centuries with the western interpretative modes. In the last few decades this western domination of biblical interpretation was challenged in the light of the socio-economic and religious situation. Since Indian Christianity is dominated by Dalits their point of view is taken seriously. For Dalits the Bible is a religious guide in their daily life-threatening situation in which they often face physical and mental oppression. At the same time it was evident that the Dalit Christian interpretation inherits certain interpretative modes from the west and Early Christian reading of the Bible.

We first of all presented the western critical understanding of Psalm 22 in the light of its form, structure and interpretation. The interpretation of Psalm 22 on the basis of historical and rhetorical critical explanation demonstrates certain features on the basis of which Dalits interpreted the psalm. The New Testament interpretation of Psalm 22 provides certain interpretative clues as Dalits appropriate the psalm in the light of the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Early Christian interpreters of psalm 22, such as Theodoret and Augustine, reflected some features that are similar to Dalit reading even when there are noticeable nuances of differences in both cases. The two modern Christian interpreters Delitzsch and Menn provided ample scope for Dalit reading of the psalm in that they sought to find the inherent

potential of the psalm as a psalm of distress and deliverance in its subsequent fulfilment in Jesus and Esther in addition to its application to the life of David.

Dalit interpretations of Psalm 22 are focused on three different aspects. First of all Dalit interpretation on Psalm 22 is examined in the light of the Hindu doctrine of karma, caste system and its related concerns. Secondly, Dalit women's view is examined as a specific concern of Dalit reading as they find certain specific features that are not found in a general Dalit interpretation. Thirdly, Dalits read Psalm 22 in the light of a Christology that is in resonance with their situation. Jesus as a Dalit, suffering servant and the drum speaks of their situation in which Jesus not only expresses solidarity in their dalitness but also gives an opportunity to register their protest so that God will vindicate their just cause and punish the oppressor.

In a conversation among Dalit and non-Dalit interpretations of Psalm 22 it is demonstrated that Dalits share several common interpretative features with their dialogue partners. At the same time Dalits contribute certain distinctive features that are not prominently surfaced among its dialogue partners. For Dalit Christians Psalm 22 is more than a mere literary piece as may be the case among some of its non-Dalit partners. It provides them an opportunity to cry, and seek justice in their oppressive situation.

The conclusions of the thesis demonstrate that in the history of interpretation of Psalm 22 Dalit Christian interpretation stands distinct as they regain their human worth and dignity in the midst of their oppression. The psalm provides them an opportunity to find God's solidarity in their distress situation and at the same time hope and victory that God's liberation will eventually come in their lives.

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## Abbreviations

AJT	Asia Journal of Theology
AJTR	Arasaradi Journal of Theological Review
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation
B0	Biblica Et Orientalia
BSac	Bibliotheca Sacra
BTF	Bangalore Theological Forum
BTESSC	Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CDSS	Centre for Dalit/Subaltern Studies
CISRS	Christian Institute for the study of Religion and Society
CLS	Christian Literature Society
CTM	Concordia Theological Monthly
CTJ	Calvin Theological Journal
EATWOT	Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
ER	The Ecumenical Review
ExpT	Expository Times
FOTL	The Forms of the Old Testament Literature
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
IJT	Indian Journal of Theology
ISPCK	Indian Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JECS	Journal of Early Christian Studies
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament

JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
KHAT	Kürzer Hand-kommentar zum Alten Testament
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NIB	New Interpreters Bible
SATHRI	The South Asia Theological Research Institute
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
TPI	Theological Publications in India
TRACI	Theological Research and Communication Institute
UT	C. H. Gordon, <i>Ugaritic Textbook</i>
VJTR	Vidyajyothi Journal for Theological Research
VT	Vetus Testamentum
WuD NF	Wort und Dienst Neue Folge
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

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# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 The Problem

This thesis examines the different contextual interpretations of Psalm 22 so that historical critical, modern Christian and Early Christian interpretations may be placed in conversation with a reader-centred Christian Dalit interpretation. Dalit interpretations of Psalm 22 are placed in conversation with the non-Dalit interpretations for the purpose of looking at the common features among the two and to identify certain distinct features in a Dalit Christian interpretation.

Dalit Christians from an Indian Christian background have inherited typical western modes of interpretation of the Bible in the past centuries particularly through their theological education in the seminaries.<sup>1</sup> The tendency to think that western modes of historical interpretation of the text were 'superior' was implanted in the minds of all Indian Christians and Dalit Christians share the same tradition. It was thought that the western mode of historical critical interpretation of the Bible was the "correct method" and all the other methods were "wrong." The recent Dalit Christian reader-centred method challenges this position.<sup>2</sup> At the same time a Dalit Christian interpretation advocates a dialogical and conversational approach that will utilize the valuable elements from the author and text centred critical methods for an authentic Dalit liberative interpretation. Dalit Christian interpretation of the Bible also works

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<sup>1</sup> For some details on the western mode of Indian education in general and theological education in particular see K. C. Abraham, *Liberative Solidarity: Contemporary Perspectives on Mission* (Tiruvalla: Christaya Sahitya Samithi, 1996). Abraham discusses the influence of western oriented theological education in India under the premise of "doing is an extension of knowing." In this regard we note the fact that although western education has helped many illiterates in India towards upward social mobility in general, theological education by and large remained a theoretical speculation of certain doctrines. In recent decades a paradigm shift has taken place in India in redefining theological education from the perspective of Dalits and other marginalised communities. Drawing inspiration from liberation theology this paradigm shift emphasizes that action and reflection should go hand in hand. We need rigorous theoretical reflection but it should emerge from the practice that is oriented to transformation. This sort of dialectical understanding of praxis leads us to think that "praxis is thought emerging in deed and deed evoking thought."

<sup>2</sup> Until recently it was normal to think that western academia manages and holds 'correct' interpretation of the Bible. For details of this discussion see David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 8.

in the context of Hindu scriptures and the caste system. For this purpose a Dalit interpretation interprets Psalm 22 with a critical combination of all different contextual interpretations. The words of George Soares-Prabhu underscore this point when he affirms that the Dalit interpretation of the Bible should

result from the cross fertilization of modern methods of New Testament exegesis with the contribution from Indian exegetical tradition, coming to flower in the stormy climate of the sociocultural reality of India today ... (an Indian interpretation) will strenuously avoid the academic barrenness which afflicts 'scientific' exegesis today.<sup>3</sup>

Without denigrating the author and text centred methods Dalit Christian interpretations of the Bible boldly venture into the interpretation of Psalm 22 in conversation with its western and other biblical interpretive traditions that are foreign to it.

### **1.1 Contextual Biblical Interpretation: A Method of our Study**

The reconstruction of the 'original' meaning of a biblical text in its proper historical context was the main aim of historical critical exegesis. While historical critical exegesis dominated biblical interpretation till recently, biblical scholarship in the developing nations during the last three decades has revealed that the true interpreters are the readers of the biblical text who construct meaning within the context of the text. This is because, "One's social location or rhetorical context is decisive of how one sees the world, constructs reality or interprets Biblical texts."<sup>4</sup> Invariably interpreters or readers are affected by their own socio-economic, religious and cultural factors. While interpreting a biblical text from a distant past, one cannot escape the influence of one's socio-economic and religious world. One understands the meaning of the text through a dialogue between the text and the reader.<sup>5</sup> In this process the readers not only interpret the text but they are being 'read' by the text in the sense that their stories are made meaningful by the text.

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<sup>3</sup> George Soares-Prabhu, "Historical Critical Method: Reflections on its Relevance for the Study of the Gospels in India Today," in Michael Amaldoss et. al (eds.) *Theologising in India* (Bangalore: TPI, 1981), p. 342. The words in the bracket are mine.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentring Biblical Scholarship," *JBL* 107 (1988), p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> D. J. Muthunayagam, "Biblical Hermeneutics in the context of the life experiences of Dalits and Burakumin Communities," *BTF* 37: 1 (2005), p. 2.

The reader-centred method perceives the meaning of the text through a dialogical interaction between the text and the reader. The context of the social location of the reader is the dominant factor that leads the reader to interpret the text. Anthony Thiselton describes the act of interpretation as a merging of two horizons—that of the text and that of the reader. Additionally, he does not call for a complete divestment of the reader's preunderstanding as one encounters the text.<sup>6</sup> The most frequent appeal to reader-response theory in biblical studies emerged from what might be called “ideological readers.” This means those who read the Bible with a definite and concrete political or ideological agenda. Liberation theologies and feminist approaches fall into this category. Similarly in the Indian context biblical interpretation is inevitably linked with certain contemporary problems. Jones Muthunayagom rightly describes the present interpretive context of the Bible and its purpose in India.

A biblical interpreter from India is affected by certain contemporary problems such as the suffering of the subaltern communities such as the Dalits, Adivasis, the women, the fisherfolk and the poor, the socio-economic disparity being caused by the globalisation, the ecological crises created by the industrialisation and deforestation and the issues related to multi-religious and multi-cultural factors. The purpose of the reading of the bible is to make a proper sense to their respective life situation. The ultimate purpose is to restore life or to bring about liberation or dignity to the affected people.<sup>7</sup>

No one can approach the biblical text completely objectively or with a completely open mind. Everyone comes to the text with certain questions and an agenda. This means that our preunderstanding will influence our interpretation of the text. The issue here is not incorrect interpretation but giving importance to certain parts of the text to achieve our goal without manipulating the text and its meaning. This means contextualization of a biblical text is what we do in the reader-response approach.<sup>8</sup>

This approach helps the “actual readers” (contemporary readers) in four ways as pointed out by Edgar McKnight. First, serious interaction with the text is facilitated; second, the readers interact with the text in the light of their own context; third, the

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<sup>6</sup> Anthony Thiselton, *New Horizons in Biblical Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), pp. 8-10.

<sup>7</sup> Muthunayagom, “Biblical Hermeneutics.” pp. 2-3.

<sup>8</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), pp. 40-41.

reader-response approach “allows the obvious religious concerns of the text to impinge upon reading in a way appropriate to the concerns of the reader.” The world of the reader will be seen “like” the biblical world that satisfies the reader; fourth, a reader-centred approach is capable of “accommodating and utilizing approaches followed in more conventional biblical and literary studies.”<sup>9</sup>

The concerns expressed above in relation to reader-centred method were already present in the precritical biblical interpretive context (prior to the Enlightenment). Little distinction was made between the biblical world and the real historical world. With the help of allegory and typology precritical interpreters saw the similarity between the biblical reality and the contemporary situation of the reader. “Old Testament stories referred directly to specific temporal events and indirectly (as figures or types) to New Testament stories, events, and realities. But these (both Old Testament and New Testament) also correspond to the historical experiences of the reader.”<sup>10</sup>

In agreeing with the principles of reader-response approach and also in consonance with the precritical readers of the Bible, Dalit Christian interpretation of the Bible claims its distinctiveness in that it “does not seek the meaning behind the text which creates distance but the meaning in front of the text which demands involvement.”<sup>11</sup>

At the same time Dalit Christian interpretation in India while following the reader-centred approach, certainly advocates the use of historical critical and literary critical interpretative modes. The words of Maria Arul Raja confirm this trend:

[A] genuine Dalit interpretation of the Bible has to have the blend of the reader-centred, text centred and also the author-centred approaches. They need not be exclusive of each other. But the validity of the interpretation from the vantage point of the Dalit readers, no doubt, is to be understood in terms of the transformative impact created by such a complex venture.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Edgar V. McKnight, “Reader – Response Criticism,” in S. L. Haynes and S. L. McKenzie (eds.) *To each its own meanings: an introduction to biblical criticisms and their application* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 206-07.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 204.

<sup>11</sup> A. Maria Arul Raja, “Some Reflections on A Dalit Reading of the Bible,” *Indian Theological Studies* 33:3 (1996), p. 249. See for a similar opinion, E. V. McKnight, *The Bible and the Reader: An Introduction to Literary Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. xviii.

<sup>12</sup> A. Maria Arul Raja, “Reading the Bible from Dalit Location: Some Points for Interpretation,” *Voices* 23: 1 (2000), p. 87.



In the light of the above discussion we see a tremendous potential in our method as confluence of and divergence in various interpretive contexts connected to Psalm 22. When a genuine dialogue and conversation takes place between different interpretive contexts we see how they move along exhibiting certain common features and modes among one another even when they differ at certain points. In the following chapters we will argue and demonstrate how the historical critical, modern and Early Christian contextual interpretations of Psalm 22 can be put in conversation with the Dalit Christian interpretation. In this process it will be demonstrated that a Dalit Christian contextual interpretation of Psalm 22 while sharing much in common with its dialogue partners, shows some distinct features on its own. It is hoped that these features will enrich the Church universal and challenge other interpretations.

## **1.2 Dalit Christian Interpretation of the Bible**

Dalit Christians under the inspiration of Latin American liberation theology started to read the Bible to unlock its message of liberation in the last two or three decades.<sup>13</sup>

The words of Soares-Prabhu confirm this:

Written for an oppressed people, the Bible is truly part of a dalit literature, with an unmistakable message for both the victims of oppression, and for all those who, like us have actively or by default contributed to their distress.<sup>14</sup>

Although the roots of Christian Dalit studies have come originally from Dalit theology proper,<sup>15</sup> the use of the Bible in legitimising Dalit theological discourse was done from day one of such a proposal. The Bible in fact is seen as a fundamental religious resource from which the solid roots of Dalit theological discourse was

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<sup>13</sup> For some details on the discussion of similarities and differences between Dalit and Latin American liberation theologies see M. Gnanavaram, "Dalit Theology and the Parable of Good Samaritan," *JSNT* 50 (1998), pp. 59-83.

<sup>14</sup> George Soares-Prabhu, "Editorial: Biblical Reflections on Christian Dalits," *Jeevadhara* 22: 128 (1992), p. 94.

<sup>15</sup> The original proponent of Dalit theology was Arvind P. Nirmal in his address in a valedictory speech of the Carey Society of the United Theological College in the year 1981 who spelt out very seminal ideas on the theme of Shudra Theology. Since then it took a definite form as Dalit theology.



constructed.<sup>16</sup> Several biblical texts are used for this purpose.<sup>17</sup> Dalit Christians assert their identity and dignity based on the message that in Jesus Christ they find a sense of self-dignity and self-worth that is denied to them by their high caste oppressors. Dalit Christians are thus seeking their liberation from casteist oppression and affirm their human identity by using the Bible<sup>18</sup> as a potential source of their religious faith. As already pointed out, a Dalit Christian interpretation of Psalm 22 can be done with the help of a reader-centred approach of a biblical text along with a cautious use of the historical and literary critical methods in addition to precritical interpretive modes. Unlike liberation theologies, for Dalit Christians it is not simply a case of class struggle, but a caste struggle. Unless a cultural change takes place this problem cannot be solved. Psalm 22 has to be contextualised over against the colonial, Hindu and high caste dominant Indian Christian theology. The hermeneutical criteria of the Indian Dalit Christian interpretation is to bring out a counter-culture against the oppressive caste culture. It also questions the dominant traditions of Hindu philosophy and Christian theology based on that philosophy which legitimize the status quo to keep Dalits oppressed and marginalised communities. Karma and caste are the twin principles that operate in a Hindu and Indian context as resources to

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<sup>16</sup> Arvind Nirmal first used the concept of wandering Aramean from the book of Deuteronomy chapter 26 and the exodus story from the book of Exodus as a paradigm for the liberation of Dalits. For a discussion on the use of Exodus as a paradigm for Minjung theology in South Korean context see Wonil Kim, "Minjung theology's biblical hermeneutics: an examination of Minjung theology's appropriation of the Exodus account," J. Harold Ellens et. al (eds.) *God's word for our world: Theological and cultural studies in honor of Simon John De Vries* Vol. II (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), pp. 159-76. Dialogue between Dalit and Minjung theology was initiated in 2001 in Asian Theologians Congress in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

<sup>17</sup> To cite few examples: J. Susaimanickam, *Committed to the Oppressed: A Dalit Reading of the Book of Job*, (Rome: Gregorian University, 1996). See note 13 above for the work of M.Gnanavaram. Several articles appeared in the last two decades include: George Koonthanam, "Yahweh the defender of Dalits: A Reflection on Isaiah 3:12-15," *Jeevadhara* 22 (1992), pp. 112-23; A. Mariaselvam, "The Cry of the Dalits: An interpretation of Psalm 140," *Jeevadhara* 22 (1992), pp. 124-139 and few more articles in the same issue of *Jeevadhara*; James Massey, *Towards Dalit Hermeneutics: Rereading the text, the history and the literature* (New Delhi: Centre for Dalit Studies, 2001). For a more recent articulation of Dalit Hermeneutics see James Massey & Samson Prabhakar (eds.) *Frontiers in Dalit Hermeneutics* (Bangalore/Delhi: BTESSC/SATHRI & CDSS, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Even when it is true that only a minority of Dalits are familiar with the Bible due to their illiteracy consider the biblical message as prominent in their lives. In Dalit homes in many villages the only valuable thing is the Bible. For details of the discussion of the place of the Bible in the lives of illiterate Dalits see Sathianathan Clarke, "Viewing the Bible through the Eyes and Ears of Subalterns in India," *BibInt* 10: 3 (2002), pp. 245-66; V. Devasahayam, *Doing Dalit Theology in Biblical Key* (Chennai: ISPCK/Gurukul, 1997).

keep Dalit Christians under the banner of untouchables and inculcate an “inferiority complex.” Dalit Christians along with their Dalit partners in general are made to think that it is their karma to suffer in this world and their birth is nothing but the result of their past karma coming from their previous births. But an authentic Christian Dalit interpretation of the Bible should address this problem. As we shall see in chapter 7 below, on the basis of their reflection of Psalm 22, Dalit Christians refute the idea that they are subjected to karma. Instead they affirm that their karma is removed due to the death of Christ on the cross and they are accepted as God’s children.

### **1.3 Motivation Behind the Selection of Psalm 22**

I chose Psalm 22 for study of contextual interpretation for two reasons. First, Psalm 22 is widely used by the Christian Church in India for the obvious reason of its association with the seven words on the cross. The psalm is regularly preached among the Dalit Christian congregations. As a Christian Dalit I myself grew up in such a tradition. Whenever grief and lament occurred in a Dalit Christian ecclesiastical community Psalm 22 was readily used as a source of reflection as it authentically resonated with their situation through the experience of cross and resurrection. Second, I was touched by my late mother’s reflective reading of the psalm on several occasions in our family prayers. She, being a poor, semi-literate and Dalit Christian woman, had always reflected on and taught me the psalm in the light of her own hardships. She had gone through the humiliation by being a Dalit woman and at the same time experienced distress in the family due to poverty and the prolonged sickness of her husband. She instantly appropriated the lament elements of the psalm to her own situation and at the same time she reflected on her own situation in the light of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is because of this personal touch given by my mother that I am especially inclined to select the psalm for my research.

In addition to the above mentioned personal reasons Psalm 22 as a biblical text for our inquiry is chosen for two other reasons.<sup>19</sup> First, Psalm 22 as a lament psalm reflects wider themes of distress and deliverance and a genuine interaction between God and the lamenter. Additionally certain trajectories of faith like rejection, resistance in the form of protest, and resolution articulated in the cry of the psalmist make it appropriate for Dalit Christians to read the psalm as their own. Second, like any other psalm the use of metaphorical language helps Dalit Christians to pray the prayer of Psalm 22 in relation to their own situation.

#### **1.4 Published and Unpublished Resources for a Dalit Christian Interpretation of Psalm 22**

The written and published resources on a Christian Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22 are not many except for a few occasionally published sermons by the Christian middle class Dalit preachers.<sup>20</sup> Sermons are regularly preached during Good Friday and other normal occasions on Psalm 22 as it is found to be a favourite psalm among many Dalit Christian audiences and preachers. For Dalit Christian interpretations of Psalm 22, the present researcher made use of the sermons (we call them 'texts') preached by the Dalit Christian pastors and lay people/leaders of the Christian Church in South India. In addition to the sermons informal group discussions that followed after the sermons (we call them 'commentaries') are made use of. Eleven sermons (texts, including two short reflections: Text 10, November 28, 2004) on Psalm 22 were recorded and heard by myself in different congregations on various dates (see Appendix – A for details of the sermons sorted out as per the dates) during October-December 2004. Followed by the sermons each group (except the group of Text 6 – November 7, 2004) discussed the psalm both in the light of the sermon and in the general Dalit use of Psalm 22. Eleven group

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<sup>19</sup> For some discussion on the selection of lament psalms for a Dalit interpretation see K. Jesurathnam, "Towards a Dalit liberative hermeneutics: Re-reading the psalms of lament," *BTF* 34: 1 (2002), pp. 11-13.

<sup>20</sup> Among several reflections using Psalm 22 for depicting the pathetic condition of Dalit Christians, some published sermons in Telugu language on a Christian Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22 include: P. Joshi, "Mediations on the Book of Psalms (Psalm 22)," *Yesu Anucharulu* (Jesus Followers) 6: 9,10 (Sept-Oct, 2004), pp. 16-19 and 8-11; Michael Jeyaraj, "The Good Friday People," *AJTR* 6: 1 (1993), pp. 74-82; Govada Dyvaseervadam, *Siluvulo Virigina Shariram – Chindina Raktam* (Vijayawada: Prabhoda Book Centre, n.d.), pp. 65-70.

discussions (commentaries) were attended by me and the outcome of the discussions were taken note of. In addition to this on November 14 seven short reflections were carried out related to Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22. These were not fully developed sermons but a mixture of short reflections and discussions.

In most cases the 'texts' were recorded with an audio tape recorder and in some cases written notes were made. The group discussions were noted down in the form of writing the main summary of the discussion along with some important illustrations. In most cases the groups and the preachers connected with Psalm 22 are from poor and 'low class' Dalit Christian background and in some cases the preachers and participants are from a middle class Dalit Christian background. Due to mechanical difficulty with the recorder, some words of the sermons had to be noted down by hand writing. The recorded materials are in Telugu, Tamil, and in Kannada and have been translated into English. Apart from this recording and transcription, some informal discussions were conducted with Church pastors, lay preachers, and congregation members of different age groups. These were intended to keep my ears open to a wider group and to listen to their story of the psalm and its relevance to their life situation. In all the cases of the interpretation of the psalm the responses of the readers are taken as the primary source for our Dalit interpretation of the psalm in the light of reader-response approach of Psalm 22.

On some occasions I attended the Church service without prior intimation and on most occasions, I was told by the pastors and lay people/leaders that Psalm 22 would be the topic of their sermon at an appointed time. Most sermons were preached extemporaneously even when they had written script available in front of them.

This thesis assumes and emphasizes that Dalit Christian preachers, both theologically trained and lay preachers of the Church are the primary resources for an authentic Dalit Christian interpretation of Psalm 22. The major themes and interpretations emerging out of the data will determine or lead the Dalit Christian interpretations or conclusions.

## 1.5 Chapter Outline

We have identified and investigated different interpretations of Psalm 22 under three major parts. The first part covers a wide range of non-Dalit interpretations with a view to take them as dialogue partners for Dalit Christian interpretation discussed in the second part of the thesis. In the third part the non-Dalit interpretations are put in conversation with Dalit interpretation both to identify the common and distinct features of the latter.

Chapter 2 examines Psalm 22 in the light of the text critical and historical critical explanations. The Hebrew Masoretic Text is translated into English and a few important problems inherent in some textual traditions are noted. These textual variations are briefly noted for our purpose of showing how they are integrated (in some cases) into Dalit and other interpretations of Psalm 22. A general view on the form, structure and setting of the psalm is discussed briefly to understand the reconstruction of its historical context. An explanation based on the form and rhetorical critical method would enable us to understand the main features of the psalm in the light of its possible historical context. The content of the psalm is better understood if certain poetic and structural features are clarified. By means of a structural transition marker at verse 22, carryover themes, and through repetition of vocabulary between the first and second part, the psalmist establishes a clear link between the lament and praise sections of the psalm. These features emerging out of this chapter will be useful for conversation with a Dalit Christian interpretation.

The third chapter examines how Psalm 22 is used by the New Testament writers. Three stances are identified among scholars in this regard. First, Psalm 22 is appropriated by the gospel writers, particularly Mark for the purpose of explaining the death of Jesus as the King of Jews or his death as a righteous and vindicated sufferer or as expected and suffering Messiah. Second, the psalm is used in the New Testament in the prophecy and fulfilment scheme. Third, the use of the psalm by the New Testament writers serves as a paradigmatic account that can be applied to any other context of distress and deliverance. The trends in the New Testament usage of the psalm can be of great significance in our dialogue between the non-Dalit and Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22.

The fourth chapter focuses on selected Early Christian interpretations of Psalm 22. These interpreters are selected on the basis of the Christological interpretation given to the psalm. Theodoret of Antiochene School and Augustine of Hippo are chosen for this purpose. Theodoret described the psalm as historical coming from the life of David. He then moved on by suggesting that the psalm is a prophecy of David about the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Augustine, while interpreting the psalm Christologically, used it as a platform for a contextualized polemic against Donatists. Moreover he allegorized the psalm at several points. Theodoret and Augustine's interpretative mechanisms of Psalm 22 are useful for a Dalit Christian interpretation. Although we find certain specific nuances in both cases in their interpretative mechanisms concerning Psalm 22, nevertheless they agree on some points by sharing their interpretative methods.

The fifth chapter identifies two modern biblical scholars' interpretation of Psalm 22 from Europe and North American Christian contexts with common interest in Jewish-Christian relations. Franz Delitzsch and Esther Menn are chosen for this purpose. Their contribution to Psalm 22 is useful for a dialogue with Dalit Christian interpretation. Delitzsch wanted to convert the Jews to Christianity. For this purpose he began to explain the psalm as the psalm of David. But the words of David can only be fully understood in their subsequent fulfilment in the passion of Jesus Christ. Esther Menn wanted an active dialogue between Jews and Christians. For this purpose she described the psalm as the psalm of David and its subsequent use in the rabbinic source of *Midrash Tehillim* where it is used as Jewish queen Esther's prayer. The psalm, for Menn, attains significance because it is associated with the passion of Jesus Christ. According to Menn Jesus and Esther as exemplary individuals inform the distress and deliverance that an individual in the psalm can face and such identification can be applied to other suffering individuals in other community contexts. The identification of the suffering individual in the psalm as Jesus or Esther helps Dalit Christian interpretation to identify themselves with the distress and deliverance of Psalm 22.

The sixth chapter introduces a general background to the Indian and Dalit socio-economic, religious and cultural factors that may play an important role in the



interpretation of the Bible. A general clarification and explanation is provided for certain concepts and terms like Dalit, social stratification, caste system, karma, sanskritization, purity-pollution, endogamy, and religious conversions in relation to Dalits as a scene-setting for what follows in chapters 7-9.

The seventh chapter examines the interpretation of Psalm 22 in the context of the Hindu scriptures, the doctrine of karma and the caste system. In the context of colonial mission activity and the high caste nineteenth-twentieth century Indian Christian theology Dalit Christians are articulating their biblical interpretation. Dalit Christians, under the pervasive influence of caste and karma, look at the psalm for a strong resolution to deny karma in their lives because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who nullifies their karmic lot unduly imposed by their Hindu and high caste oppressors. Twentieth century Indian Christian theologian Vengal Chakkarai, a non-Dalit interpreter of Psalm 22, expresses his solidarity with Dalit Christians by denying the influence of karma in a Christian life because of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Dalit Christians, while finding solidarity in the interpretation of Vengal Chakkarai differ from him in terms of emphasizing the humanity of Jesus as something special that addresses their particular needs.

The eighth chapter investigates Dalit women's interpretation of Psalm 22. Despite Dalit women's point of view sharing certain features with Dalit men's interpretation, nevertheless it moves beyond that because of their particular experience. Dalit women are thrice alienated based on their caste, gender and class. They identify with the content of Psalm 22 in the light of their social and ecclesiastical problems. They approach the psalm with critical suspicion to deconstruct certain patriarchal notions imposed on them by male counterparts. Certain problems of domestic violence, caste conflicts and sexual abuse lead these women to read the psalm in a different light. Subjugation of all women is legitimized based on certain Hindu scriptures. Dalit women are particularly targeted in this regard. Psalm 22 helps Dalit women in their rejection of the Hindu scripture's legitimisation of women's subjugation. Lament plays a very crucial role in the Dalit women's view point as they appropriate it for their protest against their oppressors. Moreover lament as dereliction and solace provides them solidarity in

the psalm as they face hardships and oppression. The passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ too provide them with a tremendous identity in their distress and they claim their victory in the resurrection of Christ expressed as an overarching theme in the psalm.

The ninth chapter examines Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22 in relation to Christology. Three prominent models are examined in this regard. Jesus as suffering Servant, Dalit and drum<sup>21</sup> are useful for Dalit Christians to articulate their pain and oppression. These models are woven into certain features emerging out of Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22. Jesus' experience of forsakenness, mockery and insult are nothing but the experiences of Dalits as they read the psalm. In and through the resurrection power of Christ Dalits are hopeful that their just cause is vindicated and thus they find the cry of abandonment in the psalm equal to their protest cry. In this protest they seek God's intervention to bring justice and punish their oppressors. In this way they do not want to simply internalize all their suffering.

The tenth chapter brings historical critical, modern, Early Christian and Dalit Christian interpretations of Psalm 22 onto a single platform for an active dialogue between them. In this chapter it is demonstrated that common interpretative mechanisms exist between Dalit and non-Dalit interpretations. Hermeneutical mechanisms like Christology and lament are common in both the cases even while they exhibit certain specific nuances. Additionally the interpretation of the psalm is also carried out with the common interpretative mechanism of literal or historical (not in the sense of historical critical), allegorical and metaphorical in both the Dalit and non-Dalit interpretations. The discussion demonstrates that while a Dalit interpretation shares much in common with its non-Dalit partners, nevertheless it expresses certain distinct features that not only enrich the universal Church but also challenge western and Early Christian modes of interpretation of Psalm 22. A Dalit interpretation puts its emphasis on the human suffering and victory of the psalmist

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<sup>21</sup> Jesus Christ as the drum (a symbol of resistance and emancipation for Dalits) is integrated into Dalit Christology based on a South Indian Dalit community called Paraiyar. For more details on this see Sathianathan Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity: Subaltern Religion and Liberation Theology in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).



and Jesus that is directly related to their suffering in this world. Lament as a powerful theological and religious resource is useful for Dalit Christians to appropriate the message of the psalm. These features are not so clearly and concretely presented among the non-Dalit partners. The psalm for Dalit Christians is more than a mere literary poetic piece since it speaks into their very life-threatening situation. For Dalit Christians Psalm 22 provides some concrete interpretative tools to protest and fight against oppressive systems of caste and karma. In the process of interpretation Dalits are empowered by God's vindication for their just cause.

The conclusions demonstrate that in the history of interpretation of Psalm 22 Dalit Christian interpretation finds its rightful place as it both shares certain common features as well as differs from its non-Dalit dialogue partners. Dalit interpretation of the psalm emerges from the Indian context of poverty, the caste system and other cultural and religious factors that have put the Dalits under terrible conditions of oppression and dehumanization. In such life threatening conditions the psalm has become a profound source of resonance, comfort towards their emancipation and liberation. As demonstrated in chapter 10 the dalitness of Jesus, lament as solace, dereliction, and protest, Jesus as the redeemer of Dalits from their karma, and Dalit women's struggle in resonance with the psalm are some of the distinctive features in the Dalit interpretation. These features of the psalm have not surfaced concretely in any of its dialogue partners. Dalit interpreters thus come up with certain hermeneutical models appropriate to their interpretive context. They interpret Psalm 22 with critical suspicion, protest and action that give them a liberative transformation from all kinds of caste oppression and transform them towards the hope that God vindicates their just cause. The interpretation of Psalm 22 also gives them a sense of self-identity and self-worth as God's children. In this process Dalits are empowered by God by the very dalitness of Jesus standing in solidarity with them.

## Chapter 2

### Exegetical Analysis of Psalm 22

#### 2.0 Introduction

Psalm 22, classified as an individual lament, describes the character of lament only in the first part of its twenty two verses. In the remaining part of the psalm we see the elements of a thanksgiving psalm. In spite of this sharp contrast between the two sections it is generally agreed to classify the psalm as an individual lament.<sup>1</sup> Viewed in this light, in the first twenty two verses of the psalm lament is a major theme, then the later part of the psalm has God's response to the cry of the lamenter and the lamenter's offer of praise and thanksgiving in response to God's answer.

In the lament psalms God is conceived by the lamenter both as problem and solution. On the one hand God is responsible for the psalmist's plight and on the other hand God is the only hope.<sup>2</sup> The stark realities of life like terror, disease, weariness, grief and even the awareness of mortality all stand between God and human beings. However, the positive note is that in the midst of all of them, it is possible to live with integrity, purpose and hope.<sup>3</sup> In the lament psalms the petitioner is allowed to articulate feelings of grief, the weary condition of the body and so on and only because of such clarity, there is an opening of a way to a deeper struggle with God.<sup>4</sup>

Viewed from this light Psalm 22 explains various features of an individual lament set within a community context. Its historical context, although subjected to different possibilities, nevertheless is useful to understand the way in which the psalm was used in its 'original' setting of lament and thanksgiving. The features of the psalm based on its form and rhetorical critical explanation provide us some glimpses of

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<sup>1</sup> Thus Gunkel classifies Psalm 22 as "Individual Lament Song" (*Die Klagelieder des Einzelnen*). See Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen: Die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933), p. 172.

<sup>2</sup> See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Psalms: Prayer Book of The Bible* Trans. Isabel Mary (Oxford: SLG Press, 1982), pp. 16-18.

<sup>3</sup> J. Clinton McCann Jr., "The Book of Psalms" in *NIB* Vol. IV (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), p. 835.

<sup>4</sup> J. David Pleins, *The Psalms: Songs of Tragedy, Hope and Justice* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), pp. 26-27.

how the poetic description of the psalm is possibly carried out in its 'original' historical setting. The present chapter examines these features of the psalm based on the Hebrew Masoretic Text and its interpretation in the light of the traditional biblical studies scholarship emerging from the European-north American (a selection of two scholars' contribution to Psalm 22 in this regard are separately treated in chapter 5 below) interpretive context. The outcome of the historical critical explanation of the psalm examined in this chapter will be put in dialogue with an Indian Dalit Christian contextual interpretation of psalm discussed in chapters 7-9.

## 2.1 The Text<sup>5</sup>, Translation and its Philological Analysis

Verse 1 לְמִנְצִיחַ אֶל-אֵילַת הַשָּׁחַר<sup>a</sup> מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד:

*By the choirmaster upon the hind of the Dawn – a Psalm of David.*

<sup>a</sup> – <sup>a</sup> The first verse is considered to be the title of the psalm and the first part of the title אֶל-אֵילַת הַשָּׁחַר translated as: “to the choirmaster, according to the deer of the dawn.” In this part the words אֶל-אֵילַת הַשָּׁחַר may mean the following:

- (a) On a general meaning of the phrase some Rabbis refer to it as the dawn itself as a hind leaping in a fresh vigor; others refer to the hind hunted in the early morning. Briggs argues that the former meaning means a joyous melody not suitable to the psalm; the latter meaning is most suitable, if there is connection between the hind in the title and אֵילוּתִי in verse 20.<sup>6</sup> Artur Weiser is of the view that the title of the psalm probably refers to the opening words of a song or the tune of which the psalm was sung or accompanied.<sup>7</sup>

- (b) LXX renders it as ἀντιλήψεως, *concerning the help that comes in the morning* explaining *ayyéleth* by the similar word *eyālūth* (*strength or*

<sup>5</sup> The Hebrew Text followed for our English translation is K. Elliger and W. Rudolph (eds.) *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> C. A. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* Vol. I (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1907), p. 190.

<sup>7</sup> Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1971), p. 218.

*succour*) in verse 20. The Targum connects it with the morning sacrifice, and paraphrases *concerning the virtue of the continual morning sacrifice*.<sup>8</sup> The basis for this translation is the vocalization of the word אֵילַת as אֵילֶת somewhat similar to the word found in verse 20.

- (c) A. Jirku has pointed to the Ugaritic deity *šhr* which is one of the “Gracious and beautiful Gods”. The words “*šhr* and *šlm*, to which a god in deer form with solar symbols inscribed on it compares, known from a report in Anatolia.”<sup>9</sup> Kraus is right that only on the basis of the two words found as the title of Psalm 22 it is very doubtful to reach such far-reaching conclusions.<sup>10</sup>
- (d) Some traditional explanations based on the content and meaning of the psalm is also suggested. For example, hind is symbolic of persecuted innocence, the dawn as an emblem of deliverance based on the two part content of the psalm. Such readings may be problematic as there is no evidence to prove them.<sup>11</sup>

Verse 2 אֵלֵי אֵלֵי<sup>a</sup> לָמָּה עֲזַבְתָּנִי רְחוֹק מִיִּשׁוּעָתִי<sup>b</sup> דְּבַרִּי שְׁאֲנָתִי:

*My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you far from my help, the words of my lament?*

<sup>a – a</sup> In the New Testament we have an Aramaic and Greek version of it, independent of the Targum and the LXX (adds the phrase *πρόσχες μοι*), with some variants which tend to support the Hebrew text. *Eli* (Matt 27: 46) is the Hebrew word, retained in the

<sup>8</sup> A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), p. 115.

<sup>9</sup> A. Jirku, “Ajelet haš-šahar (Ps 22, 1),” *ZAW* 65 (1953), p. 85f cited by Alberto Soggin “Notes for Christian Exegesis of the First Part of Psalm 22,” *BO* 29 (1974), p. 154.

<sup>10</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary* Trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p. 115.

present text of the Targum: Eloi (Mark 15: 34) the Aramaic. Some of the manuscripts also have Eloi in Matthew.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>b</sup> The phrase רָחוֹק מִשְׁוֹעָתִי may be emended to “far from my cry” for the sake of parallelism. It can be read as מִשְׁוֹעָתִי parallel to שְׁאֲגָתִי “from my cry”, with an implied subject “you”.<sup>13</sup> Literally, the word שָׁאָג means “roar” of a wild beast, generally a lion. The same verb is also used for the roaring of a lion in Isa 5:29 and in 11 Q Ps<sup>a</sup> Plea (xix: 8) we find the phrase: ‘my soul cries out’ (i.e. ‘roars out’) to praise thy name’.<sup>14</sup> The groaning of the sufferer in his distress is compared to the lion’s roar based on Pss 32: 3 and 38: 8.

It is preferable to retain the MT although the suggestions from LXX (has an addition) and other versions may be probable.

Verse 3 אֱלֹהֵי אֲקִרָא יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה וְלֹא תַעֲנֶנּוּ וְלֹא־דוֹמִיָּה לִי:

*My God, I cry by day and you do not answer; and by night, but I find no rest.*

Verse 4 וְאַתָּה קָדוֹשׁ יוֹשֵׁב<sup>a</sup> תְּהִלּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל:

*But you are Holy, you who are enthroned on the praises of Israel.*

<sup>a - a</sup> Translation of this verse depends on the placement of *atnah*. It would be possible to see the major division coming after יוֹשֵׁב (not after the previous word as in the MT). LXX and Vulgate follow this sense. Moreover both the versions render קָדוֹשׁ as “sanctuary” (but you dwell in a sanctuary, the praise of Israel) changing *qāḏōš* into *baqqōḏeš*.<sup>15</sup> We would prefer to retain the MT placement of *atnah* as it would carry the sense of the psalmist’s perplexity. Anderson rightly argues on this

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Kraus, *Psalms* 1-59, p. 292.

<sup>14</sup> J. A. Sanders, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scroll* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 120-21. Sanders translate the phrase שְׁאֲגָה נַפְשִׁי as “my soul cries out”.

<sup>15</sup> E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Psalms Translated from a critically Revised Hebrew Text with a Commentary* Vol. I (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1964), p. 96.

point: “here is a man who had committed himself to God but who is now in great calamity for no apparent fault of his own.”<sup>16</sup> Similar expressions are also found in Isa 57: 15 and Ps 102: 12.

Verse 5 בָּךְ בִּטְחוּ אֲבֹתֵינוּ בִּטְחוּ וַתַּפְּלִטֵמוּ:

*In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them.*

Verse 6 אֵלֶיךָ זָעָקוּ וְנִמְלְטוּ בָךְ בִּטְחוּ וְלֹא-בֹשׁוּ:

*To you they cried and were freed; they put their trust in you and were not disappointed.*

Verse 7 וְאַנְכִי תוֹלַעַת וְלֹא-אִישׁ חֲרַפְתִּי אָדָם וּבְזוּי עָם:

*But I am a worm, not a human being; the ridicule by men and despised by the people.*

Verse 8 כָּל-רֹאֵי יִלְעָנּוּ לִי יִפְטִירוּ<sup>a</sup> בְּשִׁפְהָ יִנְיֵעוּ רֹאשׁ:

*All who see me jeer at me, twist their lips, shake their head.*

<sup>a</sup> יִפְטִירוּ can be translated as “twist or curl their lips”. It may be an idiomatic expression referring to sneering.<sup>17</sup> C. A. Briggs rightly notes that this word is grammatically Hiphil imperfect of פטר which he translated as ‘separate with the lip, open wide with an insulting expression’.<sup>18</sup>

Verse 9 גַּל<sup>a</sup> אֶל-יְהוָה יִפְלִטְהוּ יִצִּילְהוּ כִּי חִפֵּץ בּוֹ:

*He relied on Yahweh, let him deliver him, let him rescue him because he delighted in him*

<sup>a</sup> Along with LXX and Syriac the word גַּל is emended as גָּל as perfect form to the imperative form in the MT. The root word for גַּל is גָּלַל means “to roll” and in this sense the translation goes: “he rolled his burden to his Lord”.<sup>19</sup> We agree with

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<sup>16</sup> A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms* Vol. I (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), p. 187.

<sup>17</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1983), p. 196.

<sup>18</sup> Briggs, *Psalms* Vol. I, p. 202.

<sup>19</sup> Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, p. 196.

Alberto Soggin to consider גל as the infinitive absolute with the value of perfect, so the emendation is not necessary.<sup>20</sup>

**Verse 10** כִּי־אַתָּה גָּחִי<sup>a</sup> מִבֶּטֶן מִבְּטִיחִי עַל־שְׁדֵי אִמִּי:

*Yet you drew me out of the womb and sheltered me upon my mother's breasts.*

<sup>a</sup> The etymology of the word גָּחִי is uncertain although it appears to be a participle from גִּיחַ (similar expression in Job 38:8 “burst forth” of babe from the womb).

Leveen suggests an emendation when he takes the root נוח and reads it as נָחִי or נִוְחִי “my rest and security” in order to preserve parallelism.<sup>21</sup> The other possibility would be to consider a participle of גָּחַ which means “draw forth”.<sup>22</sup> Since this word is a hapax legomenon the emendation may not be necessary.

Some ambiguity can be noticed in the translation of the second part of this verse. The LXX translates it as ἡ ἐλπίς μου means “my hope” (apparently reading מִבְּטִיחִי) from my mother's breasts(reading מִשְׁדֵּי).<sup>23</sup> The MT sense is better to retain and read it as we translated above.

**Verse 11** עָלֶיךָ הִשְׁלַכְתִּי מִרְחֹם מִבֶּטֶן אִמִּי אֱלֹהִי אַתָּה:

*Upon you was I cast from the womb, from my mother's womb you have been my God.*

**Verse 12** אַל־תִּרְחַק מִמֶּנִּי כִּי־צָרָה קְרוּבָה כִּי־אֵין עֹזֶר:

*Be not far from me, because the trouble is near and there is no one to help.*

**Verse 13** סָבְבוּנִי פָרִים רַבִּים אֲבִירֵי בָשָׁן פְּתֹרוּנִי:

*Many bulls surround me, strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.*

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<sup>20</sup> Soggin, “Notes for Christian Exegesis.” p. 156.

<sup>21</sup> J. Leveen, “Textual Problems in the Psalms,” VT 21 (1971), p. 53.

<sup>22</sup> Briggs, *Psalms* Vol. I, p. 203.

<sup>23</sup> Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, p. 196.



Verse 14 פָּצוּ עָלַי פִּיהֶם אֲרִיָּה טָרֵף וְשֹׁאֵג:

*Their jaws they open wide against me, like a lion that tears and roars.*

Verse 15

כַּמַּיִם נִשְׁפָּכְתִּי וְהִתְפָּרְדּוּ כָּל-עֲצָמוֹתַי הֵיחָּה לְבִי כְרוּנִי נָמֹס בְּתוֹךְ מִעֵי:

*Like water I am poured out and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax melting away with in my belly.*

Verse 16 יֵבֶשׁ כַּחֲרֹשׁ<sup>a</sup> כַּחֲזִי<sup>a</sup> וְלִשׁוֹנִי מְדִבֵּק מִלִּקְוֹחִי וְלַעֲפָר־מֹות תִּשְׁפָּתְנִי<sup>b</sup>:

*My throat is dried like a potsherd and my tongue is stuck to my jaws . And upon the dust of death you lay me.*

<sup>a - a</sup> Scholars have suggested emending the word כַּחֲזִי which is translated as “my strength” since it does not make much sense here. Soggin,<sup>24</sup> Craigie<sup>25</sup> and Kraus<sup>26</sup> are of the opinion that a metathesis may have occurred from כַּחֲזִי to translate as “my palate.” It is better to accept this emendation and translate the word כַּחֲזִי as “my palate” or “my throat” as it gives a better parallel to וְלִשׁוֹנִי as “and my tongue” (see also Lam 4: 4a for a similar expression: חֹךְ from חֹךְ “palate, roof of the mouth, gums”). Delitzsch’s proposal to emend the word as Talmudic כִּיחַ meaning “spittle” can also make sense in this context.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>b</sup> תִּשְׁפָּתְנִי (“you bring me down”) according to Dahood may be taken as a third-person feminine collective with a plural subject and thus translates as “they put me”, obviously because of the reason of abrupt shift from the third plural to second singular.<sup>28</sup> Kselman commenting on this proposal of Dahood rightly argues: “However, the presence of so many second person singular verbs in the poem makes

<sup>24</sup> Soggin, “Notes for Christian Exegesis.” p. 156.

<sup>25</sup> Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, p. 196.

<sup>26</sup> Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, p. 292.

<sup>27</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms* Vol. I Trans. David Eaton (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1887), p. 388.

<sup>28</sup> Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I: 1-50* Vol. I (New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. 140. See Briggs, *Psalms* Vol. I, p. 203.



this unlikely. The change from the third person “they” (vv.13-14) to first person “I” (vv.15-16a) to a second person “you” (v.16b) is similar to the change of persons in the following verses: “they” (with *sbbwny* [“they surround me”] again – v.17), “I” (v.18), “they” (vv.18-19), “you” (singular – vv.20-21).<sup>29</sup>

**Verse 17** כִּי סָבְבוּנִי כְּלָבִים עֲדַת מְרַעִים הִקִּיפוּנִי כְּאֶרֶץ יָדַי וְרַגְלֵי:

*For dogs are round about me, a gang of evildoers encircle me. They dig through my hands and feet.*

<sup>a</sup> It is generally held by the scholars that the verb is missing in the MT in the last line. But the LXX and Vulgate presuppose its existence and thus use the words *ῥυξαν* and *foderunt* respectively with the connotation of the meaning “cut”, “wound.” In this connection the word כְּאֶרֶץ has been discussed widely by the scholars. Several proposals are put forward<sup>30</sup> and we shall present two major ones briefly before adopting or supporting a view.

(a) G. R. Driver<sup>31</sup> has proposed to adopt the root as *krh* with the sense of the meaning “to bind” from the word *kārū*. Driver’s proposal is based on the Akkadian root *karāru* means “to tie, to be twisted.”<sup>32</sup>

(b) J. J. M. Roberts proposes a solution to this problem by adopting the word *kārā* (*h*) based on the Syriac and Akkadian cognates. Both languages contain a root *karû* means “to be short” which is used in certain contexts to indicate physical or mental infirmities.<sup>33</sup> Using this word then Roberts translates the

<sup>29</sup> John S. Kselman, “‘Why have you abandoned me?’: A Rhetorical Study of Psalm 22,” in David J. A. Clines, David M. Gunn and Alan J. Hauser (eds.) *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), p. 178.

<sup>30</sup> For a summary of various proposals suggested by scholars see Gregory Vall, “Psalm 22:17b: ‘the old guess,’” *JBL* 116:1 (1997), pp. 45-56.

<sup>31</sup> G. R. Driver, “Mistranslations,” *ExpT* 57 (1945-46), p. 193.

<sup>32</sup> J. J. M. Roberts argues that Driver’s Akkadian root *karāru* is really *g/karāru*, “to wind, coil”. It also means “to put in place” and thus it is not an impressive suggestion. See J. J. M. Roberts, “A New Root for an Old Crux, PS. XXII 17c,” *VT* 23: 2 (1973), pp. 247-252. Especially see note 1 in p. 249.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 251.

phrase in verse 17c as follows: “My hands and feet are shriveled up (to be short, shrunken)”.<sup>34</sup>

We adopt the suggestion made by Delitzsch based on the reading of the LXX rendering of the word ὥρξαν from the verb ὀρυσσω “to dig, bore through.” Two reasons are given by Delitzsch for this adoption. First, we can think of the presence of the corrupted word in the MT as כָּאֲרוֹ (from either the root כּוּר “bore, dig, hew” or כָּרָה “to dig”), like קָאֵם in Hosea 10:14, instead of קָם, and even the word can be written as כָּאֲרִי, like רָאֲמָה in Zech. 14:10 and קָאֲמִיא in Dan. 7:16. Second, the words כּוּר and כָּרָה not only mean to dig out and dig in, but also dig through. Moreover, by taking into consideration the Arabic parallels, Delitzsch notes that the root כּר combines the meanings “to dig” and “to round” with the sense of the deprivation of free use of hands and feet by piercing them. This sort of situation, Delitzsch observes, can be “applied to David.”<sup>35</sup>

Verse 18 אֲסַפֵּר כָּל-עֲצָמוֹתַי הִמָּה יִבִּטּוּ יֶרְאוּ-בִּי:

*I count all my bones, they look on and gloat over me.*

Verse 19 יִחְלְקוּ בְגָדֵי לְהֵם וְעַל-לְבוּשֵׁי יִפִּילוּ גֹדְלֵם:

*They divide my garments among themselves and cast lots for my cloak.*

Verse 20 וְאַתָּה יְהוָה אֵל-תִּרְחֹק אֵילֹהִי־אֲ לַעֲזָרָתִי חֹשֶׁה:

*But you, O Yahweh, do not be distant. O my help, come quickly to my aid.*

<sup>a</sup> The word אֵילֹהִי translated as “my help” is a hapax legomenon. Dahood suggests to translate it as “my army” on the basis of an Ugaritic word *ul*. He uses the text UT,

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 252. Dahood contends that this suggestion of Roberts does not carry much weight as his proposed root *karû* contains no *aleph*, instead proposes to adopt the root *ʿārāh* which is translated as “to pick, pluck” that also occurs in Song of Sol. 5: 1 and in Ps. 80: 13, in the form of *ʿārūkā*, where it describes picking clean a vineyard. See Mitchell Dahood, “The verb ʿĀRĀH, “To Pick Clean”, in Ps. XXII 17,” *VT* 24: 3 (1974), pp. 370-71.

<sup>35</sup> F. Delitzsch, *Psalms* I, pp. 391-92. See also Friedrich Baethgen, *Die Psalmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1904), pp. 64-65. Baethgen is of the view that the word כָּאֲרוֹ can mean gaping wounds made in the sufferer’s hands and legs which appear like holes.

Krt: 88 *šbk ul mad*, “your troops are a mighty army.”<sup>36</sup> Craigie rightly argues that the specific sense of army is not attested in the text chosen by Dahood. And the precise sense of the Hebrew word in the MT must remain uncertain.<sup>37</sup>

Verse 21 הַצִּילָה מִחֶרֶב נַפְשִׁי מִיַּד-פֶּלֶב יַחֲדָתִי:

*Deliver my life from the sword, my only life from the paw of the dog.*

Verse 22 הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי מִפִּי אַרְיֵה וּמִקַּרְנֵי רִמָּיִם עֲנִיתֵנִי<sup>a</sup>:

*Snatch me from the jaws of the lion and from the horns of the wild bulls—you have answered me!*

<sup>a</sup> עֲנִיתֵנִי needs some clarification in this verse. The translation according to the MT is “you have answered/heard me.” It is generally argued that this word stands as a response of the psalmist as it closes the lament and forms a transition to the song of thanksgiving that follows from vv.23ff.<sup>38</sup> LXX translates it as τῇ ταπεινώσει μου, “my lowliness.” This translation perhaps assumes the Hebrew noun as עֲנִיתִי.

Dahood suggests taking עֲנִיתֵנִי as precative perfect (perfect statement of fact) from the word עָנָה means “to conquer, triumph” as this word is also present in other places like: Pss. 18:36 and 3:8.<sup>39</sup>

The suggestion of Delitzsch (along with Driver) may be taken on this point when he observes that the word עֲנִיתֵנִי is a *perf. confidentiae* because even while praying the assurance of answered prayer is in the mind of the suppliant.<sup>40</sup>

Verse 23 אֶסְפָּרָה שִׁמְךָ לְאֶחָי בְּתוֹךְ קָהָל אֶהְלֵלְךָ:

*I will proclaim your name among my brothers. In the midst of the assembly I will praise you.*

<sup>36</sup> Dahood, *Psalms I: 1-50*, p. 141.

<sup>37</sup> Craigie, *Psalms I-50*, p. 197.

<sup>38</sup> Kraus, *Psalms I-59*, p. 292.

<sup>39</sup> Dahood, *Psalms I: 1-50*, p. 142.

<sup>40</sup> F. Delitzsch, *Psalms I*, p. 395.

#### Verse 24

יִרְאִי יְהוָה הִלְלוּהוּ כָּל־זֶרַע יַעֲקֹב כִּבְדּוּהוּ וְגִדְּדוּ מִזְמֹנֹו כָּל־זֶרַע יִשְׂרָאֵל:

*You who fear Yahweh praise him, all you descendants of Jacob honor him. And stand in awe of him, all descendants of Israel!*

#### Verse 25

כִּי לֹא־בָזָה וְלֹא שָׁקַץ <sup>a</sup>עֲנוּת עֲנִי  
וְלֹא־הִסְתִּיר פָּנָיו מִמֶּנּוּ וּבִשְׁמִיעוֹ אֱלֹהֵי שָׁמַע:

*For he has neither despised or spurned the piety of him who is poor. He has not hidden his countenance from him. When he cried, he listened to him.*

<sup>a - a</sup> The phrase: “the piety of the afflicted one” needs some clarification and explanation. It is usually translated with the sense of “affliction/misery of the poor”. But we would like to adopt the proposal put forward by Kselman<sup>41</sup> based on the work of H. Tawil.<sup>42</sup> Kselman on the basis of Tawil’s work argues that עֲנוּה in old Aramaic ’sh<sup>h</sup>nh in the Zakir inscription in the West Semitic inscription equivalent of Akkadian (w)ashrum nd should be translated as “pious or devout.” Tawil sees in the adjective עֲנוּיִם in 22:27 the Hebrew equivalent. The occurrence of the noun עֲנוּת in 22:25 “piety” makes better sense in the overall context of vv.25 and 27. The occurrence of the noun עֲנוּת can also be found in Ps. 132:1.

מֵאֲתָךְ תִּהְיֶה לִּי בִקְהָל רַב נִדְרֵי אֲשָׁלֵם נִגְדִּי יִרְאִיו: Verse 26

*From you comes my praise in the great assembly; I fulfill my vows before those who fear him.*

יֹאכְלוּ עֲנִיִּים וְיִשְׂבְּעוּ יִהְיֶה לָהֶם יְהוָה יִרְשִׁיו יְחִי לְבַבְכֶּם לְעֹד: Verse 27

*The devout shall eat and be full. Those who seek Yahweh shall praise him. May your hearts live forever!*

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<sup>41</sup> Kselman, “Why have you abandoned me.” pp. 180-81.

<sup>42</sup> H. Tawil, “Some Literary Elements in the Opening Sections of the Hadad, Zakir, and Nērab II Inscriptions in the Light of East and West Semitic Royal Inscriptions,” *Orientalia* 43 (1974), pp. 51-55 cited in Kselman, “Why have you abandoned me.” pp. 180-81.

## Verse 28

יִזְכְּרוּ וַיָּשָׁבוּ אֶל־יְהוָה כָּל־אֲפִסֵּי־אֶרֶץ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ לְפָנָיִךְ כָּל־מְשַׁפְּחוֹת גּוֹיִם:

*All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to Yahweh and all the clans of the nations shall bow down before you.*

כִּי לַיהוָה הַמְּלִיכָה וּמוֹשֵׁל בַּגּוֹיִם: Verse 29

*For truly Yahweh's is the kingship and he is ruler of the nations.*

אֲכָלוּ<sup>a</sup> וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ | Verse 30

כָּל־דִּשְׁנֵי־אֶרֶץ<sup>b</sup> לְפָנָיו יִכְרְעוּ כָּל־יוֹרְדֵי עֶפֶר וְנִפְשׁוֹ לֹא חַיָּה:

*Surely to him shall bow down all who sleep in the earth. Before him shall bow down all those who go down to dust. When a person lives no more,*

<sup>a</sup> The MT reads the word אֲכָלוּ as “they have eaten”. But in this context it may not make much sense and thus we adopt Kraus’ proposed emendation to the word אֲכָלוּ as אָךְ לוֹ corresponding to the parallelism.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>b-b</sup> Instead of דִּשְׁנֵי (“fat ones”) scholars suggest an emendation to read it as יִשְׁנֵי (“all who sleep”) in order to provide a more appropriate parallel to the word יוֹרְדֵי (“those who go down”)<sup>44</sup>.

The last phrase “when a person lives no more” is regarded as a later dogmatic addition/gloss and it is difficult to determine that point.<sup>45</sup> Kraus proposes that it may be an explanatory gloss to the previous phrase to clarify the point.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, p. 292. Craigie also agrees with Kraus that two words אָךְ לוֹ may have accidentally joined in the MT. See Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, p. 197.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* Dahood arrives at the same rendering without resorting to an emendation. By taking ׀ as relative particle as in the case of Ugaritic and Aramaic and regarding שְׁנִי as a syncopated form of יִשְׁנֵי. Further Dahood cites an example of Ps. 23:6 for another instance of syncope. See Dahood, *Psalms I: 1-50*, p. 143.

<sup>45</sup> Weiser, *Psalms*, p. 218.

<sup>46</sup> Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, p. 292.

Verse 31 : <sup>a</sup>זֶרַע יַעֲבֹדֵנִי <sup>b</sup>יִסְפֹּר לְאֹדְנִי לְדֹרֶב

*His descendants shall serve him. Let the generation to come be told of the Lord.*

<sup>a</sup> זֶרַע is translated as “seed” or “descendants” and the translation “his descendants” comes from the context, particularly from the 3<sup>rd</sup> singular masculine suffix of נִפְשׁוֹ (“his soul”= “someone, a person”).<sup>47</sup>

<sup>b-b</sup> “Let the generation to come be told of the Lord” is connected to the next sentence with the verb יִבְאוּ and is applied to לְדֹרֶב in this verse as we can notice similar sense of translation in LXX. Thus LXX reads this portion as γενεὰ ἡ ἐρχομένη (the generation that is coming).

Leveen’s<sup>48</sup> suggestion seems more probable and convincing as he proposes two major suggestions:

(a) The word זֶרַע raises the questions: which seed? And Leveen sees the clue in v 24 and thus proposes to insert יַעֲקֹב after זֶרַע and translates as “the seed of Jacob”. Leveen argues that the scribe’s attention may have wandered from יַעֲקֹב to יַעֲבֹדֵנִי.

(b) The second part of this verse is emended as יִסְפֹּר לְאֹדְנִי הַדָּרֶב (“they will recount unto the Lord his glory”). Further to this לְדֹרֶב on its own can also be emended as וְדֹרֶב (as against other suggestions to emend לְדֹרֶב as לְדֹרֶב) and the entire verse can now be read as: “The seed of Jacob shall worship him and it will recount unto the Lord his glory.”<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Kselman, “Why have you abandoned me.” p. 183.

<sup>48</sup> J. Leveen, “Textual Problems.” p. 53.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

יבאו ויגידו צדקתו<sup>a</sup> לעם נולד כי עשה: Verse 32

*And let them proclaim his deliverance to a people yet to be born, for he has finished it!*

<sup>a</sup> Dahood translates the word צדקתו as “generosity” (appears more like post-biblical term) by citing parallels in Pss 5:9; 23:3; 24:5 where the sense of צדקה may have developed out of the notions of abundance and prosperity that are resident in the root צדק.<sup>50</sup> In semantic terms, the word carries the meaning of “victory” (Judg. 5:11) or “deliverance” (Isa. 56:1). The sense of MT fits well with all these explanations. Based on Psalm 102:19 עַם נִבְרָא “a people yet to be created” Dahood point to a parallel in the reading לעם נולד “a people yet to be born.”<sup>51</sup>

## 2.2 Literary Form, Setting and the Structure of Psalm 22

The psalm as a whole is described as an individual lament. The lament elements in the first part of the psalm can be noticed as follows: direct address to God with charges of abandonment (vv 2-3); appeals to God about his deliverance in the past history (vv 4-6 and 10-11); descriptions of taunting and threatening behavior of enemies (vv 7-9, 13-14 and 17-19); enumeration of acute physical symptoms (vv 15-16 and 18); and requests for the help from God (vv 12 and 20-22). The elements of praise as part of lament is common among individual lament psalms.<sup>52</sup> The content of the second part of the psalm (vv 23-32), by contrast, differs totally to the first part and the following elements can be noted in this section: thanksgiving for the experience of liberation as an answered prayer (vv 22 and 25); vows to praise God before the congregation of fellow Israelites (vv 23 and 26); exhortation to others to join in the worship of Yahweh (vv 24 and 27); allusions to a ceremonial meal (vv 27 and 30); and a climactic vision of recognition of God’s kingship by all the people of

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<sup>50</sup> Dahood, *Psalms I: 1-50*, pp. 33-34 and 144.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p. 144.

<sup>52</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the constitutive elements of the individual laments see Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), pp. 52ff and 64-71. Westermann is of the view that words of praise can be seen as a constitutive element of the lament of individual in the psalms.



the earth including those who have already died and those who are yet to be born (vv 28-32). This distinct division of Psalm 22 into two distinct and “discrete parts has led some scholars to argue that it is a composite of at least two liturgical forms originating in different ritual contexts, most likely rites for the chronically sick or demon-possessed and thanksgiving sacrifices offered for healing.”<sup>53</sup> We shall return to this point later in our discussion.

2.2.1 Form and structure of the psalm: Psalm 22 is categorized as an individual lament set in a community context. However the lament elements can only be seen in the first part of the psalm, and the later part (verses 23-32) contain mostly the elements of praise. Within the lament part itself we can notice the elements of prayer. Thus the psalm even though classified as individual lament contains a mixture of three forms as rightly pointed out by Craigie: lament (vv 2-22) within which there are elements of prayer (vv 12 and 20-22); and praise and thanksgiving (vv 23-32). The mixture of three forms within the psalm is an indication that it was used as a liturgy in which the worshipper moves from lament to prayer, and finally to praise and thanksgiving. This liturgical dimension of the psalm most clearly emerges from its structure.<sup>54</sup>

Some have argued that the psalm, although classified as an individual lament, reviews God’s past saving deeds which are unique to the individual laments otherwise only known in the community laments. Thus Psalm 22 embraces the elements of lament and both narrative and descriptive praise, in the sequence of lament-psalm of thanksgiving-hymn. All these three elements are rooted in God’s compassion for the sufferer.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Esther M. Menn, “No Ordinary Lament: Relecture and the Identity of the Distressed in Psalm 22,” *HTR* 93:4 (2000), p. 304.

<sup>54</sup> Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, pp. 197-198. Cf. Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, p. 293. Kraus classifies the psalm as prayer song based on the elements of prayer in verses 12 and 20-22; James Luther Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation series Commentary, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), p. 106.

<sup>55</sup> Claus Westermann, *The Living Psalms* trans. J. R. Porter (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), pp. 82-83. Bernhard Duhm and others based on vv. 23-32 think it as a separate psalm composed later than the lament. See B. Duhm, *Die Psalmen* (KHAT, 14; Freiburg i.B: J.C.B. Mohr, 1899), p. 74. However most of the contemporary commentators agree that the psalm is to be regarded as a literary unity based on its content.

The exilic and post-exilic association of the psalm was proposed by some scholars. During the exilic period the psalm may have been used as a vehicle for the personified people of Israel to express their grief.<sup>56</sup> In the late exilic or early post exilic period, the praises of vv 23-32 were attached to express Judah's thanksgiving for their restoration from exile and the promise of the nations' praising Yahweh.<sup>57</sup> On the basis of the foregoing discussion related to the form and structure of the psalm we make the following suggestive conclusions:

First, Psalm 22 is an individual lament song with the praise of God in its second part as a response to the answer from God to the lamenter's appeal. Second, we notice that the thanksgiving section of the psalm in vv 23-32 reflects an actual occasion of thanksgiving for deliverance.<sup>58</sup> The contradiction that we notice between vv 2-3 (שׁוֹעָה) and v 25 (שׁוֹעַ) suggests the words in v 25 are recited not at the time of crisis but in retrospect, after the deliverance has actually experienced. Earlier in verses 2-3 the psalmist complains that God is far away from his cry, but in verse 25 the psalmist is of the view that when he cried (שׁוֹעַ) God heard his cry. Third, verses 23-32 cannot be an independent unit as some proposed because of the strong structural ties between this praise and the preceding lament in verses 1-22 of the psalm. We shall return to this point in more detail later in our explanation of the psalm. Fourth, the psalm cannot be classified as a psalm of narrative praise. The psalm does not open with a 'proclamation of praise' and an 'introductory summary' of the deliverance as it normally happens in the other narrative praise psalms like Pss 30 and 116.

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<sup>56</sup> Craig C Broyles, *Psalms: New International Bible Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), pp. 115-16.

<sup>57</sup> Earlier Baethgen, *Die Psalmen* has made post-exilic association of Psalm 22 and the identity of the individual in the psalm with the suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah. He writes: "Da aber der Sänger sich v. 23 von anderen Israeliten unterscheidet, so wird man genauer das ideale Israel oder den *Ebed Jahve* Deuterjesaias' als Subjekt des Psalms anzusehn haben." (p. 62)

<sup>58</sup> Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*. Handkommentar zum Alten Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926), p. 93.

2.2.2 Setting of the psalm: Three major and different views prevail concerning the specific origin/setting of the ritual context of Psalm 22.

First, Psalm 22 functioned as a musical component of a ritual which marked the close of a lengthy period of personal distress either in the Jerusalem temple or in some other religious centre.<sup>59</sup> According to this view the first part of the lament in the psalm serves as an introduction to the thanksgiving section. As already pointed out in our discussion on the form the psalmist may have recollected his past suffering experience in that at present they are reversed by God as a response to his prayer.<sup>60</sup>

Second, Psalm 22 was used in a small group set up as a ritual intended to promote the healing of the community members who were suffering from serious ailments.<sup>61</sup> There was a development of personal piety of the lower-religious class in parallel to the upper-religious class in the post exilic times. This group is perhaps derived from the poor class of the land and they looked unto God for their liberation from their wretched and oppressive situation (these people are called in the psalms as the “poor”). In this process they developed their own rhetoric which is expressed in the psalms of lament including Psalm 22. They sang their confidence in Yahweh despite the prevailing oppression (Pss 35:9f; 69:7, 33-37; 70:5; 109:30; 140:13). They also believed that their cry will be heard by God and the wicked will be punished, then the poor and oppressed will secure their rights and there would be an end to all violent and oppressive human rule on earth (Ps.10:18).<sup>62</sup> This is an indication that the psalm may have been composed during the postexilic period.

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<sup>59</sup> This is suggested based on the allusions found in vv 27 and 30. Here we see a possible reference to feast and therefore may refer to a thanksgiving sacrifice. Some other examples of votive thank offering: Pss 26: 6; 40: 6-10; 69: 30-33; 116: 14, 18-19.

<sup>60</sup> E. Menn, “No Ordinary Lament.” p. 307.

<sup>61</sup> See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part I: With an Introduction to Cultic Poetry*, FOTL. 14 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 112-13. Already scholars like Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* Vol. I (London: SCM Press, 1965), p. 399; H. H. Schmid, “ ‘Mein Gott, mein Gott, warum hast du mich verlassen?’ , Psalm 22 als Beispiel alttestamentlicher Rede von Krankheit und Tod,” *WuD NF* 11 (1971), pp. 119-40, have proposed that Psalm 22 contained with a variety of afflictions and it can be termed as an “archetypal affliction” of abandonment of God. They consider Psalm 22 as an outstanding example of the Old Testament way of speaking about sickness and death.

<sup>62</sup> Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period* Vol. II: *From the Exile to Maccabees* trans. John Bowden (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1994), pp. 518-22.

Third, John Eaton has proposed that the ritual context of Psalm 22 is intrinsically connected with a representative figure,<sup>63</sup> or the theocratic king, the Lord's anointed.<sup>64</sup> Thus Eaton thinks "the scale of the psalm in fact suits best a royal speaker, as in several adjacent psalms ... But also in the lamenting section of our psalm we easily discern the royal figure, though deprived for a while of his outward glory."<sup>65</sup> Moreover Eaton argues that the setting of Psalm 22 may be seen as a liturgical drama in two scenes (in accordance with the two parts of the psalm) comparable with the liturgy that lie behind Pss. 18, 118, Isa. 53 and Zech. 9:9f. In such a context of ritual enactment, the royal figure is seen as mediating the power of God and in fact this royal figure heads the entire enactment.<sup>66</sup>

In the light of the above discussion it is clear that the first two factors concerning the nature of the setting of Psalm 22 can be gleaned from the clues internal to the psalm itself, as well as from evidence provided by other individual laments in the Psalter. The third factor lacks evidence and nothing substantial from the Psalm 22 itself necessitates this view. Moreover the different views on the setting of the psalm suggests that it was indeed open to any such context of distress as may be the case with any lament psalm. Using Hermann Gunkel's ideas Broyles rightly associates himself with a similar view:

While it cannot be disproven that such language was originally intended to refer to a particular experience and its repercussions, it seems most consistent with the lament genre to read this psalm as that which embraces *any* distress and its ensuing deliverance. The implication of this type of language is that no hardship is beyond Yahweh's salvation.

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<sup>63</sup> Proposed by Kirkpatrick and others.

<sup>64</sup> Proposed by F. Delitzsch.

<sup>65</sup> John H. Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation* (London: T & T Clark International, 2003), p. 118. Also see John H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms* (London: SCM Press, 1976), pp. 34-36. Similar view was also proposed by others like: A. Bentzen, *Messias—Moses redivivus—Menschensohn*, ATANT (1948), p. 20. According to Bentzen the person abandoned by God in psalm 22 would be the "dying king" in the cultic ritual and the thanksgiving person in the later part in vv 22-31 would be the "reviving ruler" in the worship drama; A. Soggin, "Notes for Christian Exegesis," pp. 152-65; Helmer Ringgren, *Israelite Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp. 182, 234-38. This line of scholarship maintains that the individual of Psalm 22 is actually a royal figure, parallels traditional Jewish and Christian interpretations that associate the psalm with King David, Moses (great leader of the people of Israel, although not strictly speaking a king), King Hezekiah, Queen Esther and Jesus (whom the gospel writers present as "son of David" and "Messiah").

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, p. 119.

Indeed, Yahweh matches the depths of the distress with a rescue and testimony of the highest order. In a word, Ps. 22 is a paradigmatic for the individual in dire straits.<sup>67</sup>

The precise nature of the distress suffered by the individual must remain open to multiple interpretations given the metaphorical language used in Psalm 22. The interpreters of this psalm identify the misery and oppression of the psalmist in different ways. The sickness is real, related to some physical ailment and therefore nearness of death situation. The description in vv.15-18 shows this. The oppression may be due to the mental and psychological condition of disorientation<sup>68</sup> or even due to demon possession.<sup>69</sup> There is also a possibility of physical attack by enemies.<sup>70</sup> Finally the psalmist may have been experiencing a situation of social ostracism.<sup>71</sup> This inclusive capacity of the poetic imagery in the psalm helps us to appropriate the psalm to contexts other than its own. The broad range of options discussed above clearly demonstrates how the psalm's imagery and metaphorical language is applicable to many types of personal and community suffering.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Craig C. Broyles, *The Conflict of Faith and Experience in the Psalms: A Form-Critical and Theological Study* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), p. 189. See J. Clinton McCann Jr., "Psalms," p. 646. McCann argues that: "the really pertinent questions in approaching laments are not, what was wrong with the Psalmist? Who were her or his enemies? Rather, the crucial interpretative questions are these: What is wrong *with us*? Who or what are *our* enemies? This approach opens up the way for an explicitly *theological* as well as historical understanding of the laments of an individual".

<sup>68</sup> Walter Brueggemann on the general classification of the laments as songs of disorientation, description of human pathos and radical questioning of God's justice. Of course Brueggemann does not simply limit his disorientation category to a mere psychological and mental state of the lamenter, rather he looks at the disorientation situation from sociological perspective. See his work, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* ed. Patrick Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

<sup>69</sup> This view was put forward by Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* trans. Timothy J. Hallett (New York: Seabury, 1978), pp. 85-88.

<sup>70</sup> E. Menn, "No Ordinary Lament." p.308 note 28. Menn notes that the repeated references to the threatening behaviour of the enemies in vv. 7-9, 13-14, 17-19, 21-22 indicate this fact. Moreover she notes that the animal imagery found in Psalm 22 is equated with the human enemies is incorporated in some of the early translations of Psalm 22. Aquila and Theodotion interpret the "dogs" (כְּלָבִים) of Ps 22:17 as "hunters" (כְּלָבִים) by assuming a different vocalization of the Hebrew word than indicated in the MT. In another case in the Psalms Targum there is an explanatory gloss indicating "wild oxen" (רָמִים) of Ps 22:22 are to be understood as "powerful and exalted men," which is similar to Ugaritic word in UT 49: vi:18-19, according to Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms 1-50*, p. 142.

<sup>71</sup> See Broyles, *Psalms*, p.116

<sup>72</sup> In fact, many individual laments seem to have been associated with the situations of anonymous sufferers as we see in the superscription of Psalm 102. It reads as follows: "a prayer for the afflicted when he is faint and pours out his meditation before the LORD."



### 2.2.3 The transitional word עֲנִיתָנִי between the two major sections of the psalm:

A remarkable interjection of the word עֲנִיתָנִי stands between the two principal parts of the psalm. This word connects the lament with the thanksgiving section in vv.22-31. By means of this single word the lamenter declares: “Yahweh has heard me”. On the basis of Psalm 107:20, (“Yahweh bestowed answer and rescue on the lamenting poet”) J. Begrich<sup>73</sup> proposed that it is a *Heilsorakel* (oracle of salvation). Followed by him, H.J. Kraus remarks that by the presence of this transitional word we may think of an introduction of an “oracle of rescue” that Yahweh bestowed answer and rescue on the lamenting poet. When the psalm singer experienced such help, “they should thank Yahweh” as found in Psalm 107:20f.<sup>74</sup>

Kselman is of the view that the presence of *Heilsorakel* (oracle of salvation) which was pronounced at the conclusion of the lament is to assure by means of a priestly or prophetic oracle that God has heard the plea of the lamenter and will deliver him from his present trouble (see for similar examples from other psalms: 12:6; 35:3). Because of this oracle of salvation, at the end of lament there follows words of thanksgiving. Further Kselman argues that the effect of such an oracle of salvation is to allow the lament to be expanded and elaborated until the oracular assurance actually does come in verse 21: “you have answered me.” Moreover, this particular phrase is also structurally linked with the first two sections of this psalm: in verse 2 “but you do not answer me” and in verse 21 “you have answered me”.<sup>75</sup>

Brueggemann comments that the question as to how does the poet get from distress to relief and what transforms the mood, is not simply a literary one but cuts to the heart of the theological issue for faith. With Yahweh there is no anxiety, no need to flatter or manipulate, no sense that Yahweh’s act might not happen. It is to affirm that for Israel their God is powerful and accessible, whose characteristic way of

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<sup>73</sup> J. Begrich, “Das priesterliche Heilsorakel,” ZAW 52 (1934), pp. 81-92.

<sup>74</sup> Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, p. 298. Kraus points out to Mesopotamian prayers where the sick and the suffering wait for an answer of the deity. He writes thus: “They look forward to the ‘oracle of rescue’ to the ‘reliable yes,’ in order to give thanks to deity when the help has appeared”. See also Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* Vol. I, p. 401.

<sup>75</sup> Kselman, “Why Have You Abandoned Me.” pp. 185, 188.

being known is intervention to transform situations of distress. Thus the central affirmation is that Yahweh is faithful to Yahweh's promises.<sup>76</sup> However Brueggemann states that the question of how the changed mood and changed situation are affected cannot be definitively answered, but that they were changed is beyond doubt.

Westermann is of the view that in the very lament form itself there is a movement from petition to praise and these two parts of praise and lament must be regarded as in tension with each other and neither is subordinate to the other. He writes:

[T]here are no Psalms which do not progress beyond petition and lament! ... The cry to God is here never one-dimensional, without tension. It is always somewhere in the middle between petition and praise. By nature it cannot be *mere* petition or lament, but is always underway from supplication to praise.<sup>77</sup>

The variety of interpretations on the form, structure, setting of Psalm 22 lead up to the following observations and conclusions:

All the interpretations some how hold on to the issue that there might be an integral link between two parts of the psalm that is the lament section of vv.1-22 and thanksgiving section of vv. 23-32. These two are connected in different ways either through an act of some kind of ritual or through the recollection of the past deeds associated with some sickness of the psalm singer. While we think that this is a possibility, the identification of the individual speaker as a king obscures what appears to have been more common dynamic between the ordinary individual and the community to which that individual is related. This is clearly demonstrated by the psalmist in different parts of the psalm itself. Addressing God as "my God" and "our fathers" rests on belonging to a community (vv 4-6 and 9-12); those who surround the psalmist are a company of evildoers (vv 13 and 16); in the thanksgiving section the psalm singer is surround by a company of brothers in praise and faith (vv 23-24 and 26-27); the ending of the psalm in vv 28-32 imaginatively extends the

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<sup>76</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, pp.73-74. For some information on the same point see Walter Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament Themes* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), pp. 119-20 and 211-12.

<sup>77</sup> Claus Westermann, *The Praise of God in the Psalms* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1965), pp. 74-75.



community within which the individual finds himself beyond national, spatial, and temporal boundaries, to include all who acknowledge Yahweh's sovereignty.

All the interpretations underscore that there is a sudden structural transition between the first and second section. Some scholars (Gunkel, Westermann and others) see it as a deliberate way of reworking of the psalm in its previous two different segments. We would agree with Kraus that an introduction of "oracle of rescue" like in the case of Psalm 107:20 may have been introduced by the poet in order that his salvation experience may be expressed in a profound manner. Additionally the praise of God following the lament is an important and unique feature in the psalms of lament. In the case of Psalm 22 this can be noticed in the expansion of the closing words of the lament in verses 23 and 25.<sup>78</sup> Moreover as noted above we would also think that the contradiction in situation mentioned in verses 2-3 and 25 indicate the fact that the words of salvation cry are uttered in retrospect after the deliverance had been experienced by the lamenter.

### **2.3 Form and Rhetorical Critical Explanation of Psalm 22**

In this section we shall discuss the psalm in the light of its form and poetic description. This description is attempted towards the reconstruction of the meaning of the psalm in the light of its author and text centred method. The conclusions drawn from this explanation will be put in conversation with the reader centred approach of the psalm discussed in chapters 6-9 below.

#### **2.3.1 Cry of Dereliction and Experience of 'Death' like Situation (vv. 2-22)**

In the first twenty two verses of the psalm two major themes dominate all along. First, the lament cry begins with the lamenter's experience of dereliction as a mental and psychological blow when the petitioner realises that God is far away from him. Second, the lament cry gradually moves from a dereliction experience to describe the physical pain and distress with an experience of 'death' like situation with two brief interruptions (verses 4-6 and 10-11) of appealing to God's past deliverance in the community and the individual life of the lamenter. This section is clearly marked by

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<sup>78</sup> Westermann, *The Living Psalms*, pp. 82-88.

two urgent pleas in verses 12 and 20 in order that God may bring the godforsakenness of the lamenter to an end.

#### 2.3.1.1 Verses 2-3: Charges of Abandonment:

The psalmist charges God for abandoning him in his situation of distress. These charges are set in the overall framework of the cry of dereliction by the psalmist. The lament elements are introduced here in this section. The unbearable suffering and the impatient cry of the psalmist made him to cry three times “my God” as a cry of abandonment. It sets the stage for the whole mood of the psalm. The question in v. 2 “why?” is not to be understood as a lapse of faith, or a broken relationship between God and the psalmist. The psalmist is crying like an oppressed individual because of the fact that there is a feeling that God’s protective presence is withdrawn and the enemy approaches near to him. The deepest, most intimate relationship between God and the psalmist can be seen here in these verses. This relationship is encapsulated in the psalmist’s expression in the title “my God” repeated twice in v. 2 and later in vv. 3 and 11. What it means to say “my God” comes clear in vv 3-5 and 11-12. The word עֲזַבְתָּנִי summarizes all the distress as it explains the forsaken experience of the psalmist from his very hope, God, who is far away from him. Kraus is right when he interprets the verb שָׁאָג denoting the dark picture of the worst pain of affliction.<sup>79</sup> As already noted מִישׁוּעָתִי in the MT may be emended as מִשְׁוּעָתִי as a parallel to the שְׁאֲגָתִי for the sake of parallelism. This emended word can be translated as “far from my cry” along with the word רָחוֹק. Along with שְׁאֲגָתִי then it can mean “far from my salvation” are the “words of my lament.” There is a clear gulf between the two expressions as God does not answer the psalmist who cries unceasingly.<sup>80</sup> Verse 3 deals with ceaseless crying and lamenting. Even though the lamenter cries for a long period of time there was no answer coming from Yahweh and because of this the lamenter feels that he is abandoned by Yahweh.

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<sup>79</sup> Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, p. 295.

<sup>80</sup> F. Delitzsch, *Psalms I*, p. 381.

2.3.1.2 Verses 4-6 and 10-11: Appeals to memories of God's former protection and deliverance:

In these verses the psalmist begins his cry by recalling God's past deeds of salvation on the part of his ancestors. The lamenter feels that Yahweh is unchangingly the same God. The opening words "But you" (*waw* adversative) in verse 4 mark a strong contrast between what the petitioner has just told in verses 2-3 about his personal experience and what God is from the time of his ancestors. The word קָדוֹשׁ means separate or set apart.<sup>81</sup> In this sense the idea of the psalmist here may be, "Because you are holy I know that you would never break your covenant with me by suddenly abandoning me."<sup>82</sup> Further this notion of God as the holy one is clarified in the second part of the verse as it affirms God enthroned upon the praises of Israel. God as the Holy one faithfully delivered his children, Israelites, in the past.

In contrast to the above some would argue that the real function of this past reference to Yahweh's liberating activity is not to really portray Yahweh as the God of liberation at the present situation; rather it serves as an accusation of divine abandonment already mentioned in v.3. It seems ironic that God is seated on the praises for his past deeds as the psalmist is driven towards a cry for help.<sup>83</sup>

In either case, the psalmist has been greatly touched by the past memories of God in the history of his people. Because of such a strong and decisive past history of God's saving deeds, the psalmist now believes that the same God must be addressed with an appealing attitude to come to his rescue.

In verses 10-11, moving away from the historical references of God's past activity, the psalmist talks about his past personal experiences. The expression כִּי־אַתָּה ("indeed") at the beginning of verse 10 reveals once again Yahweh's faithfulness in

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<sup>81</sup> See Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), s.v. "קָדוֹשׁ," p. 872.

<sup>82</sup> J. J. S. Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* (1878; reprint Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1966), p. 240.

<sup>83</sup> Ellen F. Davis, "Exploding the Limits: Form and Function in Psalm 22," in *The Poetic Books: A Sheffield Reader*, Biblical Seminar 41, ed D. J. A. Clines (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p. 139. Davis cites an example from Lam. 5: 19-20 for a similar ironic contrast between God's eternal 'sitting' and an equally eternally forgetting of Israel. However, unlike Psalm 22 the historical grounds for the collapse of salvation *mythos* are clear.

the personal life of the lamenter. By means of the repetition of birth images (out of the womb, upon my mother's breasts, from the womb, from my mother's womb), the psalmist strongly emphasizes the firm relationship between him and Yahweh from the days gone by, from his birth and childhood. Moreover, in these verses the poet, by employing chiasm, displays the intensity and depth of such a relationship. Anthony Ceresko<sup>84</sup> has pointed out chiastic arrangement of eight elements in verses 10a and 11b. Based on his proposal the structure of this part looks as follows:

a אַתָּה (you)

b גָּחַי (who drew me out)

c מִבֶּטֶן (out of the womb)

d עַל (upon) - עַל-שְׂדֵי אִמִּי (upon my mother's breasts)

d עַל (upon) - עָלַי (upon you)

c מִבֶּטֶן (out of the womb)

b אֱלֹהֵי (my God)

a אַתָּה (you)

Verse 10 is a mirror image of verse 11. Verse 10 talks about God, then the womb, then an action done to the psalmist, and then the place of the action, and verse 11 exactly reverses this order, thus a chiastic structure appears as stated above. The two middle half-lines in both verses are linked by poetic devices—in verse 10 by a type of a rhyme between the Hebrew roots in “womb” and “sheltered me,”<sup>85</sup> and in verse 11 by the synonymity between “womb” (some translate as “belly”) and “womb.”<sup>86</sup> What the psalmist is doing here reflects God's greatness and his protective presence even from his childhood. As in verses 4-6 so now here the lamenting petitioner looks

<sup>84</sup> Anthony R. Ceresko, “The Function of Chiasmus in Hebrew Poetry,” *CBQ* 40 (1978), p. 10.

<sup>85</sup> This is called as paronomasia. Here the poet uses two words with different meaning but sound somewhat similar. For a detailed discussion on this point see Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), p. 242.

for support from his God. Just as God was the protector and liberator of his ancestors in the past, now it is the turn of the psalmist to realise this experience personally. We see here that the witness of past generations had its counterpart in the psalmist's experience. He had known what it means to trust. The word **מִבְטָיִי** (you sheltered me) in verse 10 is a translation of a form of verb **בָּטַח** (to trust) in verses 5-6. In verse 10 the psalmist affirms that his life is granted by God and in verse 11 this assertion is stated in certain terms that from the moment of his birth his life is in the hands of God.

Thus the psalmist in verses 4-6 and 10-11, by making his appeal with reference to the past experiences both of his ancestors and his own individual life, affirms his special relationship with God. Neither God's silence nor people's mocking could shake the psalmist's conviction that the Lord is still his God.

#### *2.3.1.3 Verses 7-9, 13-14 and 17-19: descriptions of the taunting and threatening behaviour of the enemies:*

By employing a series of animal metaphors and imageries the psalmist describes his enemies as the cause of his oppression and distress. The psalmist here points to the fact that his life has been disoriented and his human dignity and honour has been trodden underfoot by his enemies. By introducing *waw* and emphatic pronoun (But I) this section makes the beginning of a small new section, whereby the psalmist describes his rejection experience in moving terms. The sub-human nature of the description illustrates the total collapse of the psalmist's social world. All his human hopes are inverted and subverted.

The humiliated and disfigured lamenter is immediately attacked in verses 7-9, not by the metaphorical enemies described in animal names, but by his fellow human beings in the community. Ellen Davis observes, "Instead of finding solace and reconciliation with God through the covenant community, the afflicted person meets with mockery and mortal threats."<sup>87</sup> The psalmist is mocked by the gesture of derision by his

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<sup>86</sup> Mark H. Heinemann, "An Exposition of Psalm 22," *BSac* 147 (July-September 1990), p. 292.

<sup>87</sup> Ellen Davis, "Exploding the Limits." p. 140.

enemies (נִיְעִי רָאָשׁ) can also be found in Pss 44:14 and 64:8). These enemies taunt and mock the lamenter. This behaviour of the enemies is sharpened by the irony that “let him deliver him because (the particle כִּי may indicate causality) he delighted in him.”

In verses 13-14 the psalmist opens up the list of animal names described as his enemies. These animals were poised for attack. These animals as rightly argued by Kraus may refer to human enemies in metaphorical sense. The raging of the hostile people is described by means of metaphors referring to animals as we see in Pss 7:2; 10:9; 27:2; 35:21f. However, Kraus may be right when he refers to these metaphors in the laments always representing demonic powers that separate one from God.<sup>88</sup> Three images from the animal world<sup>89</sup> add colour to the vivid description of the plight of the psalmist who is at the mercy of “a company of evildoers.” The first one in v.13 is “strong bulls of Bashan”. Bashan is also metaphorically used in Amos 4:1, where Amos describes the situation in Samaria, particularly the rich as “cows of Bashan”. Bashan was a rich farming land which produced wheat and pasture to nourish prime cattle. This imagery therefore indicates the power and vitality of the evildoers present before the lamenter. The second imagery is used in v.14: “a ravening and roaring lion”. This imagery indicating how a lion is ready to satisfy its hunger by pouncing on its prey is also described elsewhere in psalms: 7:3; 10:9; 17:12. So the evildoers are eager to attack the lamenter like a lion and to tear him apart. The third imagery described in v.17 is the “dogs”: the scavengers, eating and

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<sup>88</sup> Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, p. 297. Kraus notes that there are parallels in the Mesopotamian poems in which the demonic powers were considered responsible for sickness and suffering were represented in the shapes of animals. Kraus refers to one example: in an “exorcism of the demon Samana” we may encounter Enuru-exorcism: Samana, he is of lion’s muzzle, he is of dragon’s tooth, he is of eagle’s claws, he is of the scorpion’s stinger, Enlil’s wild lion.

<sup>89</sup> Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form Critical Introduction* trans. Thomas H. Horner (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967). Gunkel explains that the comparison of the animals or beasts with that of human beings is not taken as abusive in the ancient world. Instead such poetic description is seen as a powerful way of describing the power and vitality of the oppressive forces surrounded by the lamenter in the psalm. The raging hostile people are similarly described in metaphors referring to animals in Pss. 7:2; 10:9; 27:2; 35:21. Cf. R. Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: a Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), p. 80.



living on waste scraps and human carcasses. They too reflect the bad and death like situation of the lamenter.<sup>90</sup>

The proliferation of animal imagery in verses 13-14 and from 17f portrays a total collapse of the psalmist's social world. When, in a social system, the relationships are skewed and the social order is reversed then there is a clear feeling on the part of the psalmist his "enemies" are no less than the beasts that will disrupt the order of creation.<sup>91</sup> All these metaphorical descriptions indicate the serious threat experienced by the psalmist from his enemies.

Verses 17-19 describe the threatening behaviour of the enemies more intensely than in other places. In verse 17 as already noted dogs are a third type of animal used to characterize the enemies of the psalmist. Elsewhere in Psalm 59 similar imagery is used to refer to the enemies of the psalmist. The imagery refers to the filthy and cruel nature of those surround the lamenter. As already noted כָּאֲרִי יָדַי וְרַגְלִי (they bind me hand and foot) in 17c is really problematic as we are not sure whether it means a real event or is used as a metaphor. Kraus may be right in suggesting "the wild dogs are a metaphorical illustration of the bustle of the 'evildoers,' who actually take captive the sufferer who is guilty (according to their view of cause and effect).<sup>92</sup>

In verses 7-9, 13-14 and 17-19 the psalmist experiences taunt, derision, physical attack by his enemies described both as real human beings and animal metaphors referring to human enemies. Their threatening behaviour and their readiness to attack the psalmist is an indication of their cruel nature. On the basis of this it seems logical to conclude that the psalmist was as close to death as one could be and still be alive. Meanwhile his enemies watched him dying, dividing up his garments. This indicated that in their minds his death was a foregone conclusion.

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<sup>90</sup> 1 Kings 21:23-24 mentions that the dogs shall eat the dead bodies of Ahab's relatives. This means that where there is a death and a carcass the "dogs" shall prevail, metaphorically speaking the evildoers wait for the death of the enemy.

<sup>91</sup> Walter Brueggemann, "Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function." pp. 34-66.

<sup>92</sup> Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, p. 297.



#### 2.3.1.4 Verses 15-16 and 18: Enumeration of acute physical symptoms:

After describing various elements of lament in the form of his charges of abandonment by God, references to the past personal and community history, taunting and jeering of the enemies with their threatening behaviour, the psalmist in these verses expresses his personal agony by enumerating a list of his physical symptoms. The description intensifies the lament cry of the psalmist more than all other descriptions. Some scholars suggested that a real sickness is described in these verses. Kraus thinks that these verses refer to “the passing and dissolution of the body in the heat of the fever.”<sup>93</sup> Craigie presupposes that these words of lament are used for those persons who were severely sick and threatened by death.<sup>94</sup> While we cannot really know whether such a condition of real sickness was the intention of the poet here, we do notice that the various physical symptoms describe the acute pain and agony of the lamenter. The poetic description related to the body parts also is an indication of the psalmist’s figurative description of verses 15-16. Here the psalmist outlines the misery he experienced through the following similes in verses 15-16:

v. 15 a Like water I am poured out

b and out of joint are all my bones

c my heart

is like a wax

d melting away                      with in me (belly/my inward parts)

v. 16 a dried like a potsherd                      my throat

b and my tongue

is stuck to my jaws

c upon the dust of the death you lay me.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, p. 198.

<sup>95</sup> The following structure is adapted with modification from Susanne Gillmayr-Baucher, "Body Images in the Psalms," *JSOT* 28: 3 (2004), p. 312.

Obviously we notice an inclusio in verses 15a and 16c where the description refers to the body of a whole person. The bones and heart are the central supporting system of physical as well as the mental unity of the body. The climax of this entire description is clearly envisaged as the death like situation. Moreover we can find that in verse 15a the expression “like water... poured out ... like wax melting away” the image of fluidity changes to the images of desiccation in verse 16a in the expression “dried like a potsherd... dust of death”. These expressions may be intended to form a merism expressing the overwhelming distress of the psalmist.<sup>96</sup> The description moves from the metaphors to the verbs employed by the psalmist. By this movement the readers are able to feel the pain and agony described by the lamenter. “The readers are forced to switch rapidly between a verbatim and a figurative understanding as they are drawn into the psalmist’s point of view. In this way the readers are able to participate in the perception of the lyrical speaker”.<sup>97</sup>

Once again the psalmist, by enumerating the physical symptoms cries out to God to understand his pain and agony and pleads to God to come to his rescue.

#### *2.3.1.5 Verses 12 and 20-22: Pleas for God’s help:*

The psalmist in these verses clearly sets out his goal towards God, to whom he lodged his complaint from the beginning of his lament cry. At the end of his lament cry he clearly moves his address to God, who is at the root of his trouble and dilemma. At the end of the first part of the lament (verses 2-12) in v.12 the psalmist comes up with an urgent plea that except Yahweh no other helper is available. This is expressed in a strong phrase: “for the trouble is near”. This trouble is further stretched and explained in detail throughout the psalm. The word צרה expresses the reality of suffering or affliction. It indicates an utter isolation and desperation of the lamenter or perhaps he may be crying from a lonely or solitary place.<sup>98</sup>

In the first part of the lament section in verses 2-12, twice the interruption is effected by means of the expressions of trust in Yahweh at verses 4-6 and 10-11. And this

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<sup>96</sup> Kselman, “Why have you abandoned me.” p. 178.

<sup>97</sup> Gillmayr-Baucher, “Body Images in the Psalms.” p. 312.

<sup>98</sup> Ellen Davis, “Exploding the Limits.” p.142.

interruption seems to come once again in verse 12 with an urgent plea. By means of the expression “Be not far from me” the psalmist appeals to God for his rescue in his desperate situation of helplessness. Similar appeal was already made in verse 2b. The same is again repeated in verse 20. Kselman makes an interesting observation on this point. The fundamental theme of the poem contained in verse 2 can be seen in the word **רָחוֹק** (far/distant) and it is repeated as a plea in the word **אַל-תִּרְחָק** (be not far/distant) in verses 12 and 20. To express the full force of this experience, the psalmist employs merism. This means that the absence of God is in space and time. Kselman explains it further by means of a visual metaphor of two axes: the vertical or cosmological axis of separation from the transcendent God in a spatial sense expressed by the word: **רָחוֹק** (far/distant) and the horizontal or historical axis of separation from God as the poet moves through the time is expressed in the words: **יּוֹמָם ... לַיְלָה** (by day...by night), crying out continually that God is not answering the cry of the psalmist. In other words Kselman argues that the psalmist can only find the distance, the absence of God in cosmos and history, in space and time, in the totality of his experience.<sup>99</sup> In order to break this total remoteness of God, the psalmist appeals to God from his distress (**צָרָה**) as his only help.

In verses 20-22 the psalmist follows on what he has already initiated in verses 2b and 12a. Here the lamenter once again uses metaphorical language to describe his enemies and at the same time making his appeal to God to rescue him from hostile forces. Westermann is right in his comment that the psalmist here through a careful structure moves back and forth in his description to reaffirm what he has already mentioned to make known his strong appeal to God. He writes:

The carefully thought out structure of the psalm appears in the way v. 11 prays for deliverance from distress, referring to vv. 6-8, and v. 19 for deliverance from enemies, referring to vv. 12-13,16, who are again portrayed as wild beasts in vv. 20-21.<sup>100</sup>

Similarly Kselman argues for a clear structural transition in this section before moving on to the thanksgiving section. In vv 11-12 we see a refrain: “... you are my God. Do not be far from me” and here in this section in verse 20 we see a refrain:

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<sup>99</sup> Kselman, “Why have you abandoned me.” pp. 183-184.

<sup>100</sup> Westermann, *The Living Psalms*, p. 87.

“But you, O Yahweh, do not be distant, O my help...” The final link that knits together sections I (verses 2-12) and II (verses 13-22) is the inclusion of **לֹא תַעֲנֶה** (and you do not answer) in verse 3 and **עָנִיתָנִי** (you have answered me) in verse 22.<sup>101</sup>

To sum up our explanation of the first part of the psalm, through a carefully constructed structure the psalmist presents his “conflict of faith and experience”<sup>102</sup> and the following quotation from Craig C. Broyles summarizes our foregoing analysis of Psalm 22: 2-22.

The psalmist presents this conflict of faith and experience by alternating descriptions of the distress with arguments of faith. The psalm moves from a complaint over God’s abandonment (vv. 2-3) to a reference to God’s deliverance of the fathers (vv. 4-6), from a lament concerning the foe’s mockery (which contains a sting of truth, vv. 7-9) to a reference to God’s nurture of the psalmist since birth (vv. 10-11), from a lament over the sense of an impending execution (vv. 12-19) to a petition summoning the Helper to draw near and save (vv. 20-22). All of these transitions are introduced by a grammatical marker (*waw*-adversatives in vv. 4, 7, 20, כִּי in v. 10, and the psalm’s first petition in v. 12, **אֵל-תִּרְחֹק**, which also appears in v. 20).<sup>103</sup>

### 2.3.2 From Lament to Praise and Complaint to Thanksgiving (vv. 23-32)

The status of the thanksgiving section of the psalm in the last ten verses was a question of debate among the scholars. But based on the form-critical study of the psalm this is not considered to be an important issue at present. As already noted this section is an integral part of the entire psalm and structurally it is well knit together with its first part. Kselman rightly proposes that this integral link between the two parts is based on the contents of the psalm itself. Some examples to demonstrate this are as follows: verses 29 and 4 focus on God’s sovereignty and the praise that it inspires. Here we can notice similarity of statement in counterpoint to the shift in tone: from the remoteness and distance of the divine king in verse 4 in the context of lament, to a triumphal affirmation of God’s majesty and universal rule in the thanksgiving in verse 29. Similar shifts in the tone can be noticed in verses 7 and 25. In verse 7 “despised by the people” to “he has not despised” in verse 25, and “far

<sup>101</sup> Kselman, “Why have you abandoned me.” pp. 187-88.

<sup>102</sup> The phrase used by Broyles, *The Conflict of Faith*, p. 190.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 190-91.

from my cry” in verse 2 to “when he cried out to him, he listened” in verse 25.

Through all these inclusions at different places the poet moves to describe a situation in the psalm when the psalmist perceived initially as God far from his cry in verse 2 to the proclamation/declaration of his salvation at the end in verse 32<sup>104</sup>

Ridderbos has pointed out that the carry-over of themes through the repetition of vocabulary establishes a close relationship between verses 22-31 and the first two-thirds of the psalm. The following are the instances mentioned by Ridderbos: הלל (praise vv.22-26) from תהלות (the praises of in v. 3); לא בזה (not despised in v. 24) from בזוי עם (despised of the people in v. 6); plus homonymic repetition of שוע in verse 1 (מישועתי from saving me) and verse 24 (ובשועו he cried) and polysemantic repetition of [אספר]ה in verse 17 (I can count) and verse 22 (I will declare).<sup>105</sup>

2.3.2.1 *Verses 22 and 25: Thanksgiving for salvation experienced as answered prayer:* In verse 22 from the previous section already by using a remarkable phrase עֲנִיתָנִי (you have answered me) the psalmist affirms that God had heard the lament cry of the psalmist and thus he responds to his God’s deliverance. As already noted above this word may be taken as a marker to indicate an oracle of rescue (or an oracle of salvation) based on other instances in Psalm 107: 21f and in the Mesopotamian prayers. Furthermore this word as already noted above serves as a thematic inclusion with that of verse 3 where the psalmist cries unto God “you do not answer” but now affirms that God has answered. In verse 16 the psalmist charges God that he has laid him in the dust of death. But the transition from complaint to praise and thanksgiving is effected by a series of imperatives in vv. 2-22. The psalmist feels more disappointed as the images of imminent death become crueler by the sword, the power of a dog, a lion’s mouth and the horns of wild oxen. But at the same time the assurance of demand also grows strongly and by employing positive

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<sup>104</sup> Kselman, “Why have you abandoned me.” p. 192.

<sup>105</sup> N. H. Ridderbos, *Die Psalmen: stilistische Verfahren und Aufbau* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972, p. 190 cited by Heinemann, “An Exposition of Psalm 22.” p. 304 note 47.

imperatives like “save me, deliver me” and finally through a prophetic perfect עֲנִיתָנִי the psalmist sees a possibility of rescue as a certainty, even if not already accomplished.<sup>106</sup>

In verse 25 the psalmist declares his deliverance as an accomplished fact. The interjection עֲנִיתָנִי is expressed in the words וּבְשׁוֹעוֹ אֱלֹהֵי שָׁמַע (“when he cried, he listened to him”). The important point expressed in this verse is that Yahweh had not turned away from the sufferer for ever and that he has heard the cry of the afflicted one.

#### 2.3.2.2 Verses 23 and 26: Vows to praise God before the congregation of Israelites:

Verse 23 sets the stage for the reversal of the situation of the psalmist along with the interjection עֲנִיתָנִי in verse 22. Earlier the psalmist was surrounded by a band of evildoers, now he is surrounded by an assembly of those who fear God. Scholars have argued for a setting of *todah* in verses 23-27, a ceremonial meal in which the person who experienced deliverance fulfills his vows in the sanctuary by sharing a sacrificial meal in the company of his family and friends.<sup>107</sup>

In v.26 the psalmist indicates that the praise emanates from Yahweh and Yahweh is the source of his faith. To this God’s activity of liberation human beings can only answer with the words of praise. The words: “great assembly” here may have reference to the full assembly of the community at the time of great annual festivals and on such an occasion the vows are paid. In the distress the sufferer vows to bring offerings and thanks in the courts of the temple.<sup>108</sup>

#### 2.3.2.3 Verses 24 and 27: Exhortations of others to join the worship of Yahweh:

In verse 24 the psalmist makes it clear to his fellow believing Israelites he declares God’s name and exhorts them to praise Yahweh as opposed to all others in verses 28-

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<sup>106</sup> Ellen Davis, “Exploding the Limits.” p. 141.

<sup>107</sup> Mays, “Prayer and Christology: Psalm 22 As Perspective on the Passion,” *Theology Today* 42: 3 (1985), p. 327. Mays suggest parallel psalms like 34 and 118 for similar songs of thanksgiving and praise. See Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, p. 201 for a similar view on the presence of a communal meal in the context of Psalm 22: 23-27.

<sup>108</sup> Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, p. 299. On the basis of Lev. 7: 15-21 Kraus argues that in distress the sufferer vows to bring offerings and thanks in the courts of the temple.



28-32. The three fold structure in the verse: praise him/honour him/stand in awe of him shows the depth of feeling behind the psalmist's call to praise his fellow Israelites. The psalmist shares his experience of salvation with his fellow human beings in the congregation in order that they too may praise and worship Yahweh.

In verse 27 the psalmist once again invites the assembly since Yahweh is addressed in third person. The sense of *today* meal already mentioned in verse 23 continues here. The word used here "afflicted" or "poor" or as we translated "devout" has connection with v.25. Along with "poor" or "devout" the "seekers" of God will be satisfied, may be referring to the same group of the people. Both **דרשיו** and **ענוים** are used synonymously that they will be satisfied with in their heart.

#### *2.3.2.4 Verses 28-32: God's salvation is declared among all the people of the earth:*

This concluding and climatic hymnic vision of an ever-widening circle of people recognizing God's kingship on earth is brilliantly presented to us by the poet of Psalm 22. Earlier in v.12 the psalmist laments the ultimate threat that is approaching or has already approached. This is put in strong words: "for trouble is near." We already explained in v.12 that the word used for trouble or affliction implies a cry of the psalmist from a lonely or an isolated place. But as the psalm proceeds now and enters into a point of trust and thanksgiving in the midst of pain and suffering, the individual circle widens and the praises of God by the lamenter are shared by the other members of the community as result of God's deliverance. The one who has suffered and experienced God's liberation now has the privilege and the responsibility to mediate that experience between God and others and to extend the horizons of the community's vision.<sup>109</sup> This means that the psalmist has now something to offer to others as a result of his confrontation and faith experience between him and God. The implication of this type of language is that no hardship and oppression is beyond Yahweh's liberation and it should be celebrated in the community of the faithful. This language further continues until the end of the psalm. In a more daring and prophetic way it further dilates and widens the circle of faith,

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<sup>109</sup> Ellen Davis, "Exploding the Limits." p. 142.



even as far as going to the dead persons, which is contrary to the idea of psalmist elsewhere. This implies that the psalm singer in Psalm 22 is a bold visionary.

In verses 28-32 the praise of God moves from a small circle to an ever widening circle that is, the entire community. The word כָּל (all) is repeated four times in this section as all the ends of the earth, all the clans of the nations, all who sleep in the earth, all who go down to dust, thus covering all the people on the earth, the living and the dead.

In verse 29 as Kraus has rightly argued there is a possibility that the psalmist is referring here to the cultic tradition of Jerusalem. Because in Zion Yahweh is honoured as the “ruler” and the “king,”<sup>110</sup> because Yahweh is the ruler of the world all the nations are due to praise him including dead. Verse 30 may have allusions to the *todah* meal. All those who sleep in the earth (שְׁנֵי, “fat ones”) of the earth will eat and worship Yahweh. This expression in accordance with Daniel 12:2 indicates that all those who sleep in the earth are drawn into the homage to Yahweh. Only because the psalmist experienced God’s remoteness and God’s silence could he experience their reversal; and because the psalmist had experienced this reversal he wanted to recount it. This recounting had advanced even into the future with the affirmation that—God had acted decisively in the life of the lamenter.<sup>111</sup> God’s saving deeds celebrated in the psalm reverberate not only to all the people of the earth and future generations but even to the dead. Elsewhere the psalmist in 88:10 raised his own doubts about the role of the dead in God’s praise: “Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead rise up and praise you?” Now in Psalm 22 the answer to these questions is affirmative.

The lament generates new perceptions of reality. The poet in and through this psalm demonstrates that there is a possibility of a future that not even death can defeat the basic hope and purpose of Israel’s life, the power of faithful praise.<sup>112</sup> The salvation of the lamenter as an afflicted one indicates that something remarkable has happened

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<sup>110</sup> Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, p. 300.

<sup>111</sup> Westermann, *The Living Psalms*, p. 91.

<sup>112</sup> Ellen Davis, “Exploding the Limits.” p. 146.

in the life of the psalmist that brings dying itself within the sphere of God's reign. The poet in Psalm 22 initiated a process of hermeneutic of new meaning that was appropriate to his own situation. The psalm's lament situation is turned into a situation of praise and complaint into thanksgiving. This overarching theme of lament and praise has been discussed in relation to the use of the psalm in the New Testament in the cross, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and in other contexts where the psalm is read. We shall return to that discussion in the chapters below

## **2.4 Conclusion**

The form and structure of the psalm has revealed that it contains lament in the first part and a response in the form of thanksgiving prayer in the second part. Yahweh's deliverance experienced by the psalmist in verse 25 is uttered not at the time of crises but after the actual deliverance. In verse 2 the psalmist utters God had not listened to his cry but now in verse 25 God had answered his cry. This created a strong structural and thematic tie between first and second part of the psalm. This thematic movement of the psalm also demonstrates that it combines the prayer and praise, the language of suffering and celebration as one arc of unity in that one is not understood without the other.

Different possibilities concerning the actual ritual setting of the psalm discussed in this chapter show the inclusive capacity of the psalm in that it applies to any context of distress and deliverance of an individual and a community.

The sudden structural transition in the psalm in verse 22 (as an oracle of salvation or rescue) speaks of an excitement on the part of the psalmist that God had already answered his prayer and delivered him from all his troubles. It serves as a clear transition marker from a situation of lament and distress to a situation of praise and deliverance.

The historical and rhetorical critical explanation of the psalm reveals a tremendous movement of lament and praise as a unified theme. In the lament part the psalmist cries that God has abandoned him even after his long cry (verse 3). Yet God's protective presence from the time of his ancestors could lift the spirit of the psalmist even when God is silent and his enemies mock at him. When the psalmist finds no comfort in the covenant community, when he feels that all his body parts are



subjected to pain, the experience of remoteness of God is vividly described by the poet. By enumerating his physical symptoms in figurative and verbal actions the poet in the psalm describes the acute pain and agony.

By means of a structural transition marker and carryover themes and through repetition of vocabulary between the first and second part the poet of the psalm establishes a clear link between the themes of lament and praise, between distress and deliverance. The psalmist experienced mockery, derision, persecution and looked like someone at the end of his life nearing towards death, both physically and mentally. But the thanksgiving affirms the experience of being liberated from the pearls of oppression and suffering. The psalmist in his lament part describes how he is socially ostracised and isolated and it is this alienation that has caused him to cry to God for a help. But now the psalmist has come to a point that God is no longer a silent spectator of the affliction of the poor and lowly, but an active liberator who will reverse the fortunes of the oppressed in a surprising and unexpected ways. Now all people beyond national, spatial and temporal borders including the people yet to be born are brought into the celebration of God's deliverance.

The two part poetic structure with lament and praise as main themes, the oracle of salvation by means of transitional marker at verse 22, and the overarching upswing of the themes of distress and deliverance are some of the ways in which Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22 proceeds. We shall return to this dialogue between the historical critical and Dalit interpretation of the psalm in chapter 10 below.

## Chapter 3

### Psalm 22 in the New Testament

#### 3.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter we discussed the details of Psalm 22 on the basis of its discussion in critical Old Testament western scholarship with a view to making it a dialogue partner with the Dalit Christian interpretation. In the present chapter we shall examine three stances prevailing in biblical scholarship on the use of Psalm 22 in the New Testament for the purpose of using it as another potential dialogue partner with the Dalit reading of Psalm 22. The obvious reason for this is that a Dalit interpretation mostly uses the New Testament references of the psalm in their articulation of distress and deliverance themes found in the psalm.

The Psalter played a crucial role in the development of the passion tradition. In all the four Gospels, the story of Jesus' death is narrated with features taken from Psalms 22, 31, and 69, to name the most obvious. The main reason for the use of psalms to narrate the most solemn event in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ was because of the conviction that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was "in accordance with the scriptures"—the gospel writers firmly believed along with their religious community.<sup>1</sup> In order to advance this purpose the early Christian community and the gospel writers used the psalms as a "kerygmatic proof" to demonstrate that "Jesus of Nazareth lived, suffered, and rose from the dead according to the Old Testament promises, prayers, and experiences of trouble and deliverance, and that he brought them to completion and fulfillment."<sup>2</sup>

In this light we can see Psalm 22 echoed in the gospel passion narratives and the New Testament. Most commentators have proposed that Psalm 22 holds the key to the use of biblical material in the passion tradition.<sup>3</sup> Some of the common passages

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* Trans. Keith Crim (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), p. 190.

<sup>3</sup> Some of the scholars who argue that the psalms gave birth to a narrative in the gospel passion account include: Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* Trans. Bertram Lee Woolf (London: Ivor

of the New Testament narrative of the passion using Psalm 22 include: the cry of Jesus on the Cross, *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani* (Mark 15:34), “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46) cites Psalm 22:2. Other instances where the psalm is implied are: in the deriding of Jesus and the wagging of heads at him (Mk. 15:29; Mt. 27:39; Lk. 23:35 compare with Ps. 22:7); the division of Jesus’ garments and casting lots for them (Mk. 15:24; Mt. 27:35; Lk. 23:34; Jn. 19:24 and compare with Ps. 22:18); The demand that God deliver him (Mt. 27:43; compare with Ps. 22:8). In regard to the use of Psalm 22 in the New Testament the following three different stances are maintained by scholars.

First: Psalm 22 was used by the Gospel writers in the context of Jesus’ death and mockery has to be looked at in terms of the overall purpose and rhetorical strategy of the gospel writers. They may have exercised the freedom to appropriate the psalm to suit their own narrative purpose.<sup>4</sup>

Second: Some scholars believe that although Psalm 22 has certain points of contact with the passion narratives in the New Testament it may be that the poem was intended as a prophecy of the sufferings of Christ. This view on the whole holds that the psalm as a prophecy has a literal fulfilment in the cross of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

Third: Psalm 22, originally may not have been intended to apply as a prophecy to the cross of Christ, but may have been intended as a paradigmatic account in that it accentuates and establishes its function as an image of perfect suffering. In a similar way the cry of Jesus on the cross is like any other lament of an ordinary human being which was already suffered by generations of Israel in faith.<sup>6</sup> Psalm 22 reflected in the passion narratives, implied Jesus’ suffering as an exemplary individual who

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Nicholson and Watson Ltd., 1934), pp. 186-87; Barnabas Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic* (London: SCM Press, 1961), pp. 90-91. For a summary of other scholars’ view on this point see Frank J. Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus: Composition and Theology in Mark 15* SBLDS 66. (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982), pp. 125-30.

<sup>4</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, “The Reversed Contextualization of Psalm 22 in the Markan Crucifixion: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis,” in *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck Vol.II* ed. F. Van Segbroeck et.al. (Leuven: University Press, 1992), pp. 1161-83.

<sup>5</sup> Among many others see F. Delitzsch, *Psalms I*, p. 392; C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1953), pp. 57-58 and 97-98; Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus*, pp. 131-35.

<sup>6</sup> Ellen Davis, “Exploding the Limits.” p. 145.

communicates his distress through the psalm.<sup>7</sup> This view proposes that any individual or a community who experiences isolation, humiliation, or suffering has parallels to the experiences of a central character from the scriptural past.

We shall examine the first stance in the light of the Markan narrative purpose<sup>8</sup> of using the psalm. The second stance has wider implications as it is read in different communities with the view that the psalm was indeed a prophecy of Christ. The third stance serves the purpose of setting the psalm wide open to use in other contexts. Some elements from the first stance are used in conversation with Dalit interpretation of the psalm. The second and third stances are particularly helpful for our purpose of setting the New Testament usage of Psalm 22 as a dialogue partner with the Dalit Christian interpretation.

### **3.1 The Use of Psalm 22 by the Gospel Writers**

The gospel writers integrated verses from the psalm directly into the passion narratives except in one place where it is stated that a verse of scripture is being cited.<sup>9</sup> In other cases the quotation is obvious because it agrees with the distinctive wording of the psalm.<sup>10</sup> In view of the evangelists' clear usage of the psalm in their gospel narratives scholars began to see the intent and purpose behind such a usage.

John Reumann maintains that Psalm 22 in the Marcan picture of Jesus' death takes the description of Jesus as righteous sufferer or to be more precise, the death of God's obedient son. He writes:

The confession of him (Jesus Christ) as "God's son" at his death, by a Gentile, with its universal implications, is the key, and there are ample hints that the theme of the "righteous sufferer who is vindicated" was in Mark's mind ... On our part we see the Marcan passion account dominated by the view that Jesus came, according to the will and plan of God (known from scripture), the Son of man, "to give his life a ransom for many"; suffering, in such a way as had become traditional in psalms of lament, obedient in sonship, and

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<sup>7</sup> Esther Menn, "No Ordinary Lament." p. 337.

<sup>8</sup> For the want of space we have focused only on Markan use of Psalm 22 and mention other occurrences of the psalm in the New Testament at relevant places.

<sup>9</sup> John 19:24 cites Psalm 22:19 as the scripture that is fulfilled in the details of Jesus' crucifixion.

<sup>10</sup> Mark 15:34 and Matt 27:46 quote Psalm 22:2; Matt 27:43 quotes Ps 22:9; Mark 15:24, Matt 27:35, and Luke 23:34 quote Ps 22:19.



ultimately triumphant via the power of God—but a “theory” of atonement or precise single-minded view has not been stamped on all the traditions Mark employs.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore Reumann, by citing several other scholars’ views, argues that the present narrative in Mark must have had an earlier (oral) passion narrative, telling of the arrest, condemnation, and execution of Jesus. Mark 15:37 (Jesus dies with a loud cry) seems to be a basic core, “whereas verse 34 (Jesus shouted with a loud cry, “Eloi...”) is usually regarded as secondary (exceptions: Goguel and Taylor), and if treated as at all original, only 34a (the fact of the cry at the ninth hour) is allowed (Linnemann, Schreiber), with the content from Psalm 22:1 at 34b assigned to later development.”<sup>12</sup> On the basis of this argument Reumann concludes: “The Old Testament coloring may thus be said to have been present in part in the basic pre-Markan account, however we define that, and to have grown through community additions and redactional work.”<sup>13</sup> Consequently *either* Psalm 22 may have been spoken by Jesus (in full or part) and the early church began to apply its language in telling of crucifixion *or* Jesus died without a “last word” or no one heard any such words, and the early church put on his lips the appropriate initial words of the psalm to interpret his death in a meaningful way.<sup>14</sup> On the whole Reumann concludes that the psalm may have been used by Jesus Christ because it expressed in its words a typical *Klagelied* piety and it may also have originated in the setting of *tôdāh* use. In either case, Jesus emerged as the “righteous, vindicated sufferer” of Israelite piety.<sup>15</sup>

Vernon Robbins, using socio-rhetorical method in the study of Marcan crucifixion, talks about the reversed contextualization of Psalm 22. The overall purpose of his study was to explore the tension between rhetorical progression in the Marcan account and rhetorical progression in Psalm 22. Robbins summarises his main thesis:

The context of mockery and death into which Marcan discourse places Psalm 22 reverses the sequence of scenes in the psalm and subverts the rhetoric of confidence expressed in it.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> John H. Reumann, “Psalm 22 at the Cross: Lament and Thanksgiving for Jesus Christ,” *Interpretation* 28: 1 (1974), p. 52.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>15</sup> Reumann, “Psalm 22.” p. 58.

<sup>16</sup> Robbins, “The Reversed Contextualization of Psalm 22.” p. 1164.



Moreover Robbins is of the view that the Marcan passage on the crucifixion scene utilizes verses from Psalm 22 in the accounts containing the ritual mockery of Jesus as king. Robbins draws a comparison between the Marcan text and the LXX of the psalm text to substantiate his thesis. We shall present one example in detail and just mention other cases before summarizing the conclusion of Robbins.

Robbins notes that the first use of language from Psalm 22 occurs in Mark 15:24. The words from the psalm emerge as the soldiers divide Jesus' garments among themselves by casting lots, but the exact wording of Psalm 22:19 (LXX 21:19) is not simply repeated in the Marcan text. Rather, Mark 15:24 contains a use of the psalm verse in typical Marcan style. The LXX of the text (Ps 21:19) reads:

διεμερίσαντο τὰ ἱμάτιά μου ἑαυτοῖς  
καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν ἱματισμόν μου ἔβαλον κλῆρον

But Mark changes the verse to:

Καὶ σταυροῦσιν αὐτὸν  
καὶ διαμερίζονται τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ,  
βάλλοντες κλῆρον ἐπ' αὐτὰ τίς τί ἄρη.

Robbins summarizes three features for the change in the Marcan text from the LXX of the psalm verse. First, The Marcan text has changed parallelismus *membrorum* construction of the psalm verse into a three clause statement by adding σταυροῦσιν αὐτὸν and introducing καὶ-paratactic plus present participle and thus gets

- (a) *and* they crucify him
- (b) *and* they divide his garments
- (c) casting lots for them who takes what.

The initial clause about crucifying Jesus is a continuation of 15:20c and the participial middle clause ends with an ironic twist on carrying as the soldiers carry a piece of Jesus' garment away, in contrast to Simon who carried Jesus' cross in 15:21. Second, the Marcan text sustains a historic present tense throughout the clause, in contrast to the aorist tense in the LXX text. Third, the Marcan text describes a third person narrative voice: "they divide his garments" rather than the first person narrative voice: "they divide my garments". Robbins concludes: "These features exhibit standard Marcan style as language has been rephrased from Ps 22,19 to formulate the dramatic conclusion to a scene in which Jesus, mocked as 'King of

Jews', is dressed in royal garments, re clothed in his own garments, then left without clothing as he hangs in public humiliation on the cross."<sup>17</sup>

The other places where the Markan text follows the same method include: Mark 15:25-32 using the language of Psalm 22:8-9 (LXX 21:8-9) and Mark 15:33-39 begins with the recontextualization of opening verse of the Psalm 22. Robbins argues:

The sequence of Mk 15 inverts the sequence of Ps 22, and with this inversion comes a subversion of its rhetoric. The sufferer of the psalm expresses hope to the end; Jesus on the cross expresses the agony of abandonment by everyone including God ... The Markan approach, which emphasizes the agony and reality of Jesus' death, produces a backward reading of Ps 22. The reading begins with verse 19, the place in the middle of the psalm where the sufferer refers to the dividing of his garments by the casting of lots. The reading continues by proceeding backwards to verses 7-8, where the sufferer refers to the wagging of heads and the mocking speech, "let him save him". Then the Markan text moves back to verse 6 of the psalm as the narratorial voice says that those crucified with Jesus "reviled" him, just like the sufferer in the psalm refers to himself as "reviled" of men. Last of all, the reading proceeds backwards to the first two verses of the psalm. The Markan reading ends with the death cry of Jesus, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"<sup>18</sup>

Robbins concludes that by using Psalm 22 in an inverted order the narrator in Mark 15 presents the ironic death of Jesus as "King of Jews". Because of this use of the psalm, the sustained mockery in the Markan account becomes deeply ironic.

According to Mark the kingdom of God is realized in and through the ironic death of Jesus as the "King of Jews" followed by his resurrection.<sup>19</sup>

Frank Matera, Donald Juel, and Robert Rowe argue for the motif of Jesus as the Messiah king dominant in the gospel narratives that use Psalm 22, more particularly in Mark's gospel.

Matera examines the significance of Psalm 22 in the Marcan narrative by using the redactional techniques underlying the work of the evangelist. Matera's main thesis is:

We now wish to argue that for Mark's community the psalm verse is more than a descriptive phrase of Jesus' abandonment. The great cry of the Crucified one brings to mind the entire psalm. To that extent Mark's community understands the cry of 15:34 as the cry of the Messiah King, a cry first uttered by David himself. Thus, by juxtaposing the great cry of Ps. 22 and the Elijah mockery, the evangelist shows in still another way that the bystanders mock Jesus as Messiah King, i.e., the Messiah King who cries out the opening verse of David's lament.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 1176-77.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 1179-80.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1182.

<sup>20</sup> Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus*, p. 133.

Matera argues that the cry of Jesus in Mark is derived from the entire psalm and its Davidic authorship. The hymn in Psalm 22:28-32 becomes a proclamation of eschatological victory seen in the announcement of the centurion by confessing Jesus as God's son. The scope of thanksgiving expressed in the last verses of the psalm is thus understood by Matera as messianic and eschatological and it is because of this that the Christian community chose the psalm for Jesus' passion. Seen in this way the psalm not only describes "the suffering of the just one; it also portrays his victory in language that is susceptible to messianic and eschatological interpretation."<sup>21</sup>

Donald Juel argues that the Psalter, like any other part of the scripture, was used by the evangelists to demonstrate the rejection and death of Jesus as Messiah is in accordance with the scripture. His main thesis is:

despite repeated attempts by source critics to isolate the OT allusions in the passion story from royal motifs (i.e., from Jesus' death as King of the Jews), the psalms were in all likelihood employed from the earliest stages of the tradition to recount the death of Jesus the King. Psalms 22, 31, and 69 were thus from the outset read as "messianic."<sup>22</sup>

Concerning the use of Psalm 22 by the narrator in Mark 15, Juel points out "that Mark wove the thread from Psalm 22 into the fabric of his narrative because Jesus actually spoke the words at his death."<sup>23</sup> Furthermore the narrator used the psalm as part of the story of the crucifixion of the King of the Jews—that is, referring to the anointed King from the line of David expected at the end of days. However, Juel thinks that the evidence for such an interpretation cannot come from pre-Christian Jewish exegesis, but rather from the unique events in the climax story of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, his death as messianic pretender and his vindication by God, although such interpretation remains elusive.<sup>24</sup>

Robert Rowe argues like Matera and Juel that the use of the psalms in the passion narrative of Mark was intended to present Jesus as Messianic King, but slightly deviates in saying that this messiah of Mark is linked to his suffering. Rowe states:

In Mark, Jesus is tried, condemned, mocked and crucified as the Messiah, and his last recorded words are taken from Psalm 22:1 ... Psalm 22 is also set (like Psalm 89) in the

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 135.

<sup>22</sup> Juel, *Messianic Exegesis*, p. 90.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p. 115.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 116.

context of God's kingship (verses 3, 28)... Psalm 22 may be seen as describing in greater detail the Messiah's sufferings and humiliation, as well as his vindication.<sup>25</sup>

Again Rowe summarizes his conclusions and puts a clear emphasis on the motif of the suffering messiah king underlying the use of Psalm 22 in the Marcan crucifixion scene. He writes:

All our four major Psalms (2, 118, 110, and 22) emphasize the Messiah's dependence on the authority and power of God, which can be seen as expressions of God's kingship (or 'kingdom') ... Psalm 22 is also set in the context of God's kingship, and while the very real suffering evidenced by the cry of dereliction must be allowed its full force and effect, the other allusions to this Psalm in Mark's passion narrative show that (for the narrator at least) the cry was intended to evoke more than just the first verse ... The Messiah suffers and dies. His vindication is anticipated by God's kingly act in the tearing of the temple curtain (15:38), and the associated confession of the centurion, "Truly, this man was the Son of God!"<sup>26</sup>

On the basis of the scholars discussed above regarding the role and function of Psalm 22 in the gospel narratives, particularly in Mark 15, we make the following brief observations and conclusions:

Scholars on the whole note that the gospel writers, particularly Mark, weave the verses from Psalm 22 into their narrative thread so as to make it an integral part of the description of the passion of Jesus. This enables the gospel writers to adapt the psalm to suit their purpose. In some cases the rhetoric of the psalm is reversed to present the ironic story of the passion of Jesus Christ. At the same time scholars also read various motives behind the gospel writers' use of the psalm. The account of Jesus' passion is to emphasize the irony of the passion in that Jesus dies as the one who is rejected, and mocked as the Messiah or the king of Jews. To affirm this underlying motive the psalm is used at appropriate places by the gospel writers. Moreover they argue that the psalm's use in the gospels can be seen in the "messianic" sense of the long expected one. However, no precedent exists for such an interpretation in Jewish exegesis, but we can derive such a reading from the climactic story of Jesus of Nazareth at the time of his suffering on the cross. But one cannot justify the argument that the suffering messiah idea was present in the psalm and for that reason the gospel writers, and above all Mark, used the psalm in their

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<sup>25</sup> Robert D. Rowe, *God's Kingdom and God's Son: The Background to Mark's Christology from Concepts of Kingship in the Psalms* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002), pp. 301-03.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 306.

crucifixion narrative. All the scholars are right in arguing that the gospel writers used the psalm in their passion narratives to emphasize the death of Jesus on the cross as the one mocked and rejected according to the scriptures.

### **3.2 Psalm 22 as a Prophecy and Fulfillment of Jesus Christ**

Some interpreters take the view that Psalm 22 was used by the gospel writers in their narration of the passion of Jesus Christ in order to drive home the point that the psalm is a prophecy of David that may have been fulfilled in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ.

Matera, basing his argument on the patristic evidence<sup>27</sup> of the use of Psalm 22 related to the passion of Jesus Christ, maintains that the New Testament understood the psalm in terms of God's eschatological victory as well as Jesus' sufferings.

Moreover, the psalm was ascribed to David, the prophet and king, who spoke the psalm prophetically. Matera concludes that along with Psalm 110 and 118, Psalm 22 was a prophetic composition of King David, who speaks of the Messiah King and Mark has juxtaposed it with the Elijah mockery in the light of the eschatological dimension of the great cry of Jesus.<sup>28</sup>

Franz Delitzsch is of the view that the psalm is prophetic predicting Jesus Christ in the words of David. According to him verse 17c as a prophecy of David is literally fulfilled in the case of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Moreover the expression in verse 19 of the psalm (dividing and casting lots for the garments) are words of prophecy literally fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ.<sup>29</sup>

Heinemann has argued very strongly that Psalm 22 is messianic in character. He writes:

But the striking thing about Psalm 22 is its messianic character. God inspired David to write in such a way that certain aspects of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ were clearly prefigured: His perplexed cry, "My God, my God" (v. 1; see Mark 15:34), the mockings of the onlookers (Ps. 22:6-8; see Matt. 27:39-43), the piercing of His hands and feet (Ps. 22:16; see John 20:24-27), and the casting of lots for His garments (Ps. 22:18; see John 19:24). The fact that the writer to the Hebrews quoted Psalm 22:22 in Hebrews 2:12 as the words of Jesus certainly validates the view that the psalm is messianic.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> From Justin's first apology (138-156 A.D.) and his *Dialogue with Trypho* (155-161 A.D.).

<sup>28</sup> Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus*, pp. 131, 135.

<sup>29</sup> F. Delitzsch, *Psalms* I, p. 392.

<sup>30</sup> Heinemann, "An Exposition of Psalm 22," p. 286.

Heinemann talks about the prophecy and fulfillment of the psalm in the New Testament not as David's direct prediction of the sufferings of Jesus Christ, but rather indirectly prefigured them as a type. Heinemann regards the concept of typology as a subcategory of prophecy and on this ground describes David's experience in the psalm as beyond his own experience in Psalm 22, and thus typology can be seen as blending into direct prophecy. Heinemann concludes:

David's descriptions of his own suffering in this psalm closely correspond to what Jesus must have experienced during His scourging and execution. What David wrote fits well with the exhaustion, stretching, suffocation, and circulatory stoppage that occur during crucifixion.... The bulls, lions, and dogs also prefigured Jesus' enemies—the Jewish leaders who accused Him, the Roman leaders who condemned Him, and the rabble who screamed, "Crucify him!"<sup>31</sup>

On the basis of the above discussion we conclude that Psalm 22 was used in the gospels in the light of prophecy and fulfillment scheme, although this view is strongly contested (by Kraus and others) on the grounds that we do not have the mathematical precision which will enable us to demonstrate the congruence of prophecy and fulfillment. It is argued that Jesus' suffering and death was very much seen in the light of so called Davidic 'prophecy' of the future 'Messiah' expressed in the psalm.<sup>32</sup> This scheme fits well with the interpretation of the gospel writers, particularly Mark, as they saw an eschatological dimension of God's vindication of the suffering of the just one in the great cry of Jesus on the cross.

### **3.3 Psalm 22 as a Paradigmatic Account of Perfect Suffering**

As noted above, Psalm 22, like any other psalm, was not intended as prophetic but was intended to depict a paradigm of perfect suffering so as to make it relevant to any context. Like any other psalm, the presence of metaphorical language makes the psalms relevant to any other context other than its 'original' setting. Because of this, Psalm 22 is applied to Jesus Christ, his passion and death on the cross in the New Testament. Patrick Miller expresses this view:

The resonance between lament and human story may help us give concreteness and content to the plight of the troubled petitioners of these prayers. The interpretative task is not tied to the search for a single explanation for a particular lament, but can center in opening up through different stories and moments examples of human plight that may be articulated through the richly figurative but stereotypical language of the laments. Such an interpretative

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 302-03.

<sup>32</sup> Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, p. 202 maintains that the psalm can be seen as messianic in the light of the New Testament usage. In this sense Psalm 22 can be interpreted as a messianic psalm par excellence.



move receives its strongest confirmation within the Christian tradition by the way in which the Passion stories of the Gospels are related to Psalm 22. Lament and narrative of Jesus' sufferings are bound together. The dividing of Jesus' garments (Mark 15:24 – Ps. 22:18); the people deriding Jesus and wagging their heads (Mark 15:29 – Ps. 22:7); the words of the people, "He trusts in God; let God deliver him now" (Matt. 27:43 – Ps. 22:8); and Jesus' cry of forsakenness (Mark 15:34 – Ps. 22:1) all invite one to see in Jesus one of those who cries out in laments. His plight becomes a paradigm of the trouble of the lamenting petitioner; and his experience of personal agony, of God-forsakenness, and of the taunts and attacks of various kinds of enemies and evildoers, gives us the cardinal example of how the dimensions of lament express the realities of human experience. So the reader of the Gospels is provided Psalm 22 as an interpretative clue to understand who this one on the cross is and what he is undergoing and the reader of Psalm 22 is invited to see in the Passion of Jesus as a concrete and specific example of what these laments are all about.<sup>33</sup>

This view clearly expresses the wider function of the psalm in other than its 'original' ritual context. When the psalm was thus freed from its 'original' setting and context, it had altogether a different outlook. This is also related to the figure of David as the 'original' writer of the psalm.<sup>34</sup> When the psalm is ascribed to David and the content is applied to him, specific significance is achieved in the interpretation of the psalm. In a similar way, when the psalm is applied to the passion of Jesus Christ, the 'original' meaning is transformed in a radical way. Scholars have proposed various models connected with this kind of interpretation. Kraus opines that in interpreting Psalm 22 as related to the passion of Jesus Christ, two things are happening specifically. First, Jesus enters into an archetypal affliction of abandonment by God. Jesus, by identifying himself with the suffering described in the psalm, shows us the path of the lowest depths of misery that the Son of man experiences. Second, the early Christian community associated the sufferings expressed in the psalm with that of Jesus' on the cross.<sup>35</sup> In this way Kraus notes that the suffering and praise in the psalm becomes typical and paradigmatic and "catches hold of something that is archetypal and supraindividual."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Patrick D. Miller, Jr. "Trouble and Woe: Interpreting the Biblical Laments," *Interpretation* 37: 1 (1983), p. 45.

<sup>34</sup> For a detailed discussion of David as petitioning author of the psalms in general and Psalm 22 in particular see Esther Menn, "No Ordinary Lament." pp. 310-16.

<sup>35</sup> Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, p. 301.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*



Schuman argues in a similar line that Psalm 22, when used as a liturgy of Good Friday, becomes a paradigm of perfect suffering exemplified on the cross of Jesus Christ. He writes:

A great number of psalms are sung, and what they have in common is the theme of conspiring, treason and accusation of the innocent. Again the 'I' of these psalms is evidently taken as the 'I' of Christ himself ... The appropriateness of these psalms (35, 88, and 22) is found in their direct application to Christ, his deepest humiliation and his most exalted glorification.<sup>37</sup>

In the light of possible reflections of Psalm 22 in Qumran Thanksgiving Hymns (1QH 5:5-19), Loren R. Fisher has argued that, if the teacher of righteousness used it in the lamenting situation, Jesus could have also used it "in the same way."<sup>38</sup> Similarly, H. D. Lange has also pointed out possible parallels to Psalm 22 in the Thanksgiving Hymns in 1QH.<sup>39</sup> However, Lange is of the view that such possible parallels may not be direct and conscious borrowing at their best but concludes, "What does seem evident is that the Qumran psalmist knew the Scriptures. He identified himself with the sufferer portrayed in Ps. 22 and found the language of Ps. 22 appropriate for describing his own situation."<sup>40</sup> Although Fisher and Lange have not provided direct evidence to show that the teacher of righteousness or the Qumran community in general has possibly used the lament motif from Psalm 22 in their affliction, and that the Qumran teacher or the community may have used it in a different context than Jesus Christ, their point is well taken that such possible usage speaks of the appropriation of the psalms, and in particular the lament theme from Psalm 22, by pious Jews as they faced affliction. This usage also shows us how the psalms were freely used for a contemporary application, even before the gospel

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<sup>37</sup> Niek A. Schuman, "Pascal Liturgy Psalmody in Jerusalem 380 – 384 CE: Some Observations and Implications," in Dirk J. Human and Cas J. A. Vos (eds.) *Psalms and Liturgy* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), pp. 148, 152.

<sup>38</sup> Loren R. Fisher, "Betrayed by Friends: An Expository Study of Psalm 22," *Interpretation* 18: 1 (1964), pp. 20-38. Fisher shows only some common elements found in Psalm 22 as comparable with 1QH 5:5-19. For instance the word 'forsaken' is found in 1QH 5: 5-19 in the opening line as "I willingly thank thee, O Lord, for thou has not forsaken me" and in lines 6 and 12 "thou hast not forsaken me."

<sup>39</sup> H. D. Lange, "The Relationship Between Psalm 22 and the Passion Narrative," *CTM* 43 (1972), pp. 610-21. Lange notes similarity between the sufferers in texts that contain a complaint in 1QH with that of Psalm 22. For instance, "My tongue is stuck to my jaw" compare 1QH 5:31 with Psalm 22:16, and the sufferer's pained bones and heart is melting like wax compare 1QH 4:33-34 with Psalm 22:15.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 613.

narratives in the New Testament were composed. This is an indication of the fact that biblical passages like Psalm 22 became a paradigm for perfect lament and thanksgiving. The psalms become alive and dynamic once they are read by different individuals in a different setting other than their 'original' context.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

The gospel writers, particularly Mark, used Psalm 22 in their narratives for different purposes. The evangelists wanted to drive home the point that the passion and death of Jesus on the cross has taken place in accordance with the scriptures and at the same time they affirm that the Jesus who died as the rejected and mocked one is also the King of Jews, the expected messiah. Jesus died as a righteous and vindicated sufferer for many. In order to show the deep irony of the death of Jesus as "King of Jews" Mark used the psalm (in an inverted order) in places where the ritual mockery of Jesus was found. The cry of Jesus on the cross in the light of Psalm 22 depicts what is not only the cry of suffering but also his victory.

Psalm 22 is seen as prophecy of David fulfilled on the cross of Christ in the New Testament. It is argued on the basis of parallels between the psalm in verses 2, 7-9, 17c and 19 and Markan and other gospel writer's parallels. The psalm is a prophecy of Christ because David is seen as a type and that is why his experience in the psalm fits Jesus' on the cross.

When the psalm is applied to the passion and crucifixion scene of Jesus Christ the 'original' meaning of the psalm in the cry of dereliction is already confirmed with that of the cry of Jesus on the cross. Moreover the agony and mockery experienced by the psalmist and its correspondence with the cry of agony and mockery of Jesus Christ on the cross becomes a 'perfect' paradigm of suffering of any individual or a community. The reader of Psalm 22 is invited to see the passion of Jesus Christ as a specific example in which a perfect model of suffering can be articulated. Any such reading context of Psalm 22 has the potential to inform us of the dynamism of the psalm in the same way as we see it in the light of its New Testament usage.

Certain features from the New Testament usage of Psalm 22 like: Jesus' death as righteous vindicator, 'messianic' pretender, suffering messiah, and his ironic death as "King of Jews" can be made relevant in the overall conversation of the psalm with the Dalit Christian interpretation. The psalm as a prophecy of David and the psalm as

a paradigm of 'perfect' suffering point towards close parallel reading contexts between the New Testament usage of Psalm 22 and its Dalit use.

## Chapter 4

### Early Christian Interpretation of Psalm 22

#### 4.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter we discussed how Psalm 22 is contextualized and appropriated by the New Testament writers. It was argued that the psalm was used by the gospel writers, particularly Mark, to suit their rhetorical and theological purpose. The psalm was also examined in terms of the prophecy of David fulfilled in Christ. Moreover in the New Testament the passion of Christ provided a concrete context for Psalm 22 to express the distress as well as deliverance in that it is taken as a 'perfect' paradigm for any such interpretive context. It was pointed out that such a New Testament contextual usage of the psalm can serve as a potential dialogue partner with the Dalit Christian interpretation of the psalm discussed in chapters 6-9 below. The present chapter discusses the interpretation of Psalm 22 by the selected Early Christian Fathers and takes their interpretive mode as one more non-Dalit point of comparison for an active engagement with Dalit interpretation as a conversation partner.

In dealing with the biblical text the Early Christian interpretation not only takes the author or redactor of the text seriously, but it takes the reader, the hearer, commentator or the preacher and the church, seriously as well. In other words the precritical interpretation of the Bible lies in that "the concern of the ancient exegete was not simply, or even primarily, to reconstruct the *Sitz in Leben* of the text being studied but to elucidate its *Sitz in unserem Leben*, its situation in our life; the hearers' faith in the living context in which its scriptural meaning—its meaning for our salvation—is to be found."<sup>1</sup> One more significant difference between the critical and precritical exegesis is that unlike the critical approach, the precritical approach understood "the primary reference of the literal or grammatical sense of the text not as the historical community that gave rise to the text, but as the believing community

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<sup>1</sup> Brian E. Daley, "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable? Some Reflections on Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms," in Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (eds.) *The Art of Reading Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2003), p. 77.

that once received and continues to receive the text.”<sup>2</sup> The precritical emphasis thus falls on the interest of the text “because it bears a divinely inspired message to an ongoing community of faith and not because it happens also to be a repository of the religious relics of a past age.”<sup>3</sup> All this does not mean to say that the precritical interpreters are less concerned about the questions of authorship, original context of the text and like. “Explaining *what the text means in itself* was not seen as separate from explaining *what it has to say to the church*, precisely because the narrative contained in the Bible was not seen as a closed unit, epistemologically distant from the life of its readers and hearers, who receive it as God’s word.”<sup>4</sup>

Psalm 22 was understood in the above light by Early Christian interpreters. The present chapter focuses on one Antiochene father namely Theodoret and Saint Augustine of Hippo from the Western Church, whose treatment of Psalm 22 will be set in dialogue with the contemporary Dalit Christian interpretation in chapter 10 below. A brief contextual backdrop of these two Early Church interpreters is presented before dealing with their commentary on Psalm 22.

The reason for selecting Theodoret and Augustine as our precritical dialogue partners with Dalit interpretation of the psalm is two fold. First, the exposition of Psalm 22 survived in the collection of writings by both these figures and an English translation of the text is available to us. Second, both these Early Church interpreters discuss the psalm with certain hermeneutical features that seems to have fitted in well with a Christian Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22. We shall discuss details of this in chapter 10 below.

#### **4.1 Biblical Exegesis at the Antiochene School: An Overview**

During the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries new initiatives were developed towards maintaining familiarity with the scripture both in the eastern and western churches. This was done by means of homily and commentary on the Bible to appeal both at the popular and

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<sup>2</sup> R. A. Muller and J. L. Thompson, “The Significance of Precritical Exegesis: Retrospect and Prospect,” in Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson (eds.) *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: Essays presented to David C. Steinmetz in honor of his sixtieth birthday* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 340-41.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 341.

intellectual levels. During this time the emergence of the Antiochene School as part of eastern exegesis with a programme antagonistic to the allegorical exegesis of Alexandrian school was a significant development.

As a contrast to the Alexandrian school, the Antiochene School promotes a literal style of exegesis, although Theodoret, whose treatment on Psalm 22 we shall present below, moderates his position from the rigid literalism of his predecessors Diodore and Theodore. "The narrative and argumentative coherence of the text was important to the Antiochenes, and it was from this they deduced moral and dogmatic conclusions."<sup>5</sup> Following the concept of *mimēsis* of ancient literary criticism, the Antiochene School understood "the wording and content of the scriptures as 'mimetic' of divine truths, thus providing moral and doctrinal teaching, but also prophecy."<sup>6</sup> This is exemplified when the biblical figure of "Jonah prefigures Jesus because the extraordinary events of his life signify by *mimēsis* Christ's rejection, resurrection, and conversion of the Gentiles."<sup>7</sup>

#### **4.2 Interpretation of Psalm 22 by Theodoret of Cyrus**

Theodoret was born in a wealthy family in Antioch in the year 393, a dozen years after the second ecumenical council held in Constantinople in 381, and died in 460. Theodoret studied under Theodore of Mopsuestia of the Antiochene School. He was also influenced by Diodore of Tarsus, the founder of the Antiochene School. After the death of his parents Theodoret distributed all his inherited property and embraced a life of poverty and lived in a village called Nicerte, seventy-five miles from Antioch. During this time he spent seven "calm and happy" years visiting neighbourhood monasteries. He was appointed as a bishop to succeed Isidorus at Cyrus. He was an able administrator. He was sympathetic to the material and spiritual needs of his fellow clergymen and the people of his diocese. He lived a simple and modest life and his clergy followed his admirable example. He wanted to

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<sup>4</sup> Daley, "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable?" p. 78. The italics are the words of the author.

<sup>5</sup> Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 173.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

draw all the heathen, heretics and Jews to the true faith in the midst of the heresies prevailing in his diocese. He was a famous preacher in and out of his diocese. He fought against the heretics with strong zeal and determination.<sup>8</sup>

His exegetical works deal with a large number of the Old Testament books including his work on the Book of Psalms.<sup>9</sup> His commentary on the Book of Psalms was composed at a time when he was at the height of his power as a bishop of Cyrus. The commentary on psalms was intended for the students of religion or his fellow cenobites. Interestingly Theodoret's commentary on the psalms does not reflect either the work of an exegete nor is it concerned to reflect his own world and readers.<sup>10</sup> Theodoret moderates his position compared to his predecessors Diodore and Theodore's rigid literalism "making room for traditional Christological interpretation of the Old Testament."<sup>11</sup> This moderate approach of Theodoret does not simply talk about any re-examination of the relationship between literal and typological interpretations of the Old Testament; rather it simply talks about the mitigation of literal approaches concerning the Old Testament.<sup>12</sup> In this light, Theodoret explains his position on the psalms as coming from David as overwhelmingly prophetic with moral and dogmatic teaching values. In his preface to the commentary on the Book of Psalms he clarifies this point:

The psalmist employs not only prophetic discourse but also parenetic and legal discourse as well; sometimes the teaching he offers is moral, sometimes dogmatic; in one place he laments the misfortunes of the Jews, in another he foretells the salvation of the nations. Frequently, however, it is the Passion and Resurrection of Christ the Lord he is predicting,...<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, (eds.) *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (Second Series): Theodoret, Jerome, Gennadius, Rufinus - Historical Writings etc.* Vol. 3. (Grand Rapids: W. B Eerdmans, 1956), pp. 1-4.

<sup>9</sup> Bishop of Cyrus, Theodoret, *Theodoret of Cyrus: Commentary on the Psalms 1 – 72* Translated by Robert C. Hill (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Manilo Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis* Trans. John A. Hughes (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), p. 74.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 75.

<sup>13</sup> *Theodoret of Cyrus: Commentary on the Psalms 1-72*, p. 21.



Within this broad framework, Theodoret writes his exposition on Psalm 22. The overall Christological stamps on this psalm are obvious in his very introductory remarks:

THIS PSALM FORETELLS the events of Christ the Lord's Passion and Resurrection, the calling of the nations and the salvation of the world.<sup>14</sup>

Theodoret talks about the suffering and abandonment of the psalmist in the opening cry of the psalm as relating Christ and the notion that divine suffering and abandonment can impugn divine impassibility. However he clarifies his point that Jesus Christ suffered on behalf of all human beings so as to procure salvation for the entire creation.

So he calls *abandonment* not any separation from the divinity to which he was united, as some suspected. But the permission given for the Passion: the divinity was present to the form of a slave in his suffering and permitted him to suffer so as to procure salvation for the whole of nature. Of course, it was not affected by suffering from that source: how could the impassible nature suffer? It is Christ the Lord as man, on the contrary, who speaks these words, and since he was the first fruits of human nature, it is on behalf of all nature that he utters the words in what follows: *The words of my failings are far from saving me.*<sup>15</sup>

Similarly Theodoret observes that the words in the psalm are related to Jesus Christ with a touch of human passion and emotion. Jesus Christ is seen as the Son of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29), and in the light of Paul's words in 1 Cor 5:21. Theodoret adopts the LXX translation for the phrase "my groaning" as "my failings" and comments:

*The words of my failings are far from saving me:* do not have regard to the faults of nature, he is saying, but grant salvation in view of my sufferings. And since he dealt with the passion in human fashion and frequently prayed at the time of Passion, "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me," and in his distress he said, "My soul is sorrowful to the point of death," it was right for the psalm also to predict it in the words, *O God, I shall cry to you by day, and you will not hearken me, by night, and not to my folly* (v. 2).<sup>16</sup>

Theodoret interprets the animal metaphors in verses 13f of the psalm as specific enemy figures coming from the time of Jesus Christ.

Now, he calls *bulls* the priests and scribes, entrusted with ruling the people and given to great audacity; *young bulls* those under them, calling them *fat* because revealing in the good things supplied by him ... So the psalm describes in advance the attacks of the chief priests, the

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

scribes, and the Pharisees, who in imitation of the audacity of bulls and the frenzy of lions hemmed in Christ the Lord.<sup>17</sup>

Theodoret saw verses 17-19 of the psalm as directly connected to the passion and death of Christ. For this purpose he brings a proof from the later words of Jesus Christ.

Then he describes the deeds perpetrated by them: *They dug my hands and feet, they numbered all my bones* (vv. 16-17). This is obvious and clear even to the most contentious: we hear in the sacred Gospels the Lord himself saying to his holy disciples, "Look at my hands and my feet for proof that I am here in person." And he actually showed Thomas the marks of the nails and the blow of the spear. Now, *they numbered all my bones* suggests, in crucifying me they stretched me out so that it would be easy for anyone wishing to do so to get to know even the number of my bones. *Whereas for their part they stared and scrutinized me*, that is, mocking and jeering at me. *They divided my garments among them, and on my clothing cast lots* (v. 18). Now, this, too, the story of the sacred Gospels clearly teaches us.<sup>18</sup>

Theodoret affirmed at the very beginning that the psalm talks about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He could see the theme of resurrection found in the psalm in the exposition of verses 27 and 30:

*Their hearts will live forever*: though clad in a yet corruptible body, they are refreshed by the hope of resurrection and look forward to eternal life.... *all who go down to the earth will be prostrate before him*. After the resurrection from the dead, you see, they will offer this adoration to God, some willingly, some unwillingly, some by desire, some through fear, according to that apostolic saying, "Every knee will bend to him, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."<sup>19</sup>

In line with his argument that the entire psalm is the prophecy of David about Christ, Theodoret sums up the message of the last two verses of the psalm as David's prophecy:

*The generation to come will be reported to the Lord, and will report his righteousness to the people to be born, whom the Lord made* (vv. 30-31). Not about this generation do I speak, he is saying, in terms of which I, David, make this prophecy, but about the one to come and the people to be born, whom the Lord of all himself set up. So he prophesied all this.<sup>20</sup>

At certain places Theodoret used the words of the psalm to address Jews by pointing out their disobedience to the law. Theodoret wanted to embrace all people in his

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 149.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 150.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 152-53.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 154.

Church in the midst of the prevailing heresies. Theodoret's words make this clear in relation to verses 16 of the psalm.

Now, it was right for him to name the former *bulls* and the later *dogs*: one group were subject to the Law, even if they openly transgressed the Law, while the other were impure in terms of the Law ... Nevertheless, after the Passion those former *dogs* took on the status of sons through faith, whereas those who once had enjoyed the care shown to sons received the name of dogs for raging against the Lord like very dogs.<sup>21</sup>

At another place (in verse 30-31) Theodoret, in order to emphasize the Christological interpretation of the psalm, disapproves of Jewish claims that the psalm belongs to David. He comments:

Not about this generation do I speak, he is saying, in terms of which I, David, make this prophecy, but about the one to come and the people to be born, whom the Lord of all himself set up. So he prophesied all this. For my part, however, I deplore the stupidity of the Jews on the score that, though in constant contact with the divine utterances, they do not take in the truth that is so clearly obvious to them. Instead, they declare the psalm refers to David, taking him to be the one crying out.<sup>22</sup>

Flexibility and moderation in his hermeneutical practice can be noted throughout Theodoret's exposition of the psalm and its application to the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ *in toto*. For this purpose Theodoret refutes the Jewish claim that the psalm is exclusively ascribed to David. At the same time like any other Antiochene biblical exegete, he located the psalm in its proper historical context of the Old Testament, that is, in the life of David.

Theodoret's exposition of Psalm 22 is of particular importance and value to a contemporary Dalit Christian interpretation. This is obviously seen in his treatment of the psalm in relation to the "historical facts" from the life of David; to his validating of the psalm as a prophecy of David about Christ; to the metaphors and imagery relating to some specific "figures" in Christ's life; and above all to the overall interpretation of the psalm in the light of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Theodoret could easily equate the metaphors of the psalm like "bulls" and "dogs" with the Jews and Gentiles of Jesus' time in order to emphasize the point that the

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 150.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 154.

Jews are no better than the Gentiles and the latter had been given the status of God's children because of Christ's resurrection. Even though Theodoret is not talking about the cultural inequalities which existed between Jews and Gentiles, nevertheless his explanation of the psalm concerning them and his tendency to explain the metaphors "bulls" and "dogs" as Jews and Gentiles is helpful for Christian Dalits as they try to affirm their equal status among their caste oppressors. Dalits are the "Gentiles" in their own land without any equal rights on par with their caste oppressors. Additionally Dalits allegorize certain metaphors in the psalm like "bulls" and "dogs" referring to their caste oppressors.

True to his modest and simple living Theodoret views the human suffering and agony of Jesus Christ reflected in the words of the psalm. For this Theodoret explains that Christ suffered as a human being and underwent the passion in human fashion. Christ experienced pain and went through the agony and prayed in the garden of Gethsemane involving human emotions. Dalit Christians see the content of the psalm in a similar light as explained by Theodoret.

#### **4.3 Biblical Exegesis in the Context of West in the Early Church**

With the exception of Jerome, Western fathers felt little need to deal with philological or historical questions as in the East. There is a widespread tendency towards interpreting the biblical texts based on allegorical interpretation, but with a variety of attitudes and diverse reservations. Some of the key figures<sup>23</sup> of biblical exegesis from the West include: Marius Victorinus, who advocated limited knowledge of the Old Testament, but mainly focused on the Pauline books of the New Testament; Tyconius, a Donatist activist between 370-390, who was known for his commentary on the Book of Revelation with allegorical and spiritualizing interpretation; Jerome, whose exegetical works on the Bible focus on the three fold division of the biblical meanings, historical, moral and spiritual. On the whole Jerome's exegetical work is impressive with philological rigour and originality of interpretation; Augustine of Hippo was another influential figure in the Western Church with a strong rhetorical sensitivity to the Bible. His exegesis was developed

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<sup>23</sup> For an overview on this discussion see Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 86-91.

for the primary purpose of his pastoral activity. We can notice this trend in his exposition of Psalm 22 to which we shall turn now.

#### 4.4 Augustine's Interpretation of Psalm 22

Augustine (354-430 C.E.) is one of the key figures of the West in the interpretation of the Bible for his contemporary usage. He was a strong allegorist. Augustine develops his exegesis of biblical passages principally in the service of pastoral activity. His works are therefore pastorally oriented in the form of sermons. In the words of Simonetti, Augustine's overall exegesis works with the view that: "The Old Testament is the figurative promise, while the New Testament is the promise understood in spiritual sense ... We are in the ambit of the traditional typological and more generally allegorical reading of the Old Testament, the one best able to develop the text read in Church in such a way as to instruct the faithful and encourage them in Christian commitment."<sup>24</sup>

We see in the same light Augustine's overall method of exegesis of the Book of Psalms in his two phrases *psalmus vox Christi* and *psalmus vox ecclesiae*.<sup>25</sup> Augustine is reported to have called Jesus Christ 'the singer of the psalms'.<sup>26</sup> He interpreted psalms within a broad Christological framework. Augustine, along with other Church Fathers, interpreted the psalms in terms of hearing the voice of Christ speaking either in his own name or in ours.<sup>27</sup> In Psalm 69, Augustine argues that the psalm refers to Christ not only as head but also as the body, i.e., the Church. Augustine shows a frequent adherence to traditional structures of Alexandrian hermeneutics by interpreting the psalms allegorically.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>25</sup> Howard N. Wallace, *Words to God, Word from God: the Psalms in the Prayer, and Preaching of the Church* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 77.

<sup>26</sup> L. Sabourin, *The Psalms: Their Origin and Meaning* (New York: Alba House, 1974), p. 171.

<sup>27</sup> For a detailed discussion on this point see John E. Rotelle (ed), *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Part III, vol. 15: Expositions of the Psalms 1-32* (New York: New City Press, 2000), pp. 50-55.

<sup>28</sup> Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation*, p. 107.

Augustine's preaching on Psalm 22 survived in the form of his first and second expositions. In his first exposition Augustine reads the psalm in the voice of Christ himself. It is very briefly presented in the light of the cross, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The context of Augustine's second exposition is a sermon preached on a Good Friday. Here he identifies the enemies as specifically Donatists whom he addresses as "heretics" and "wranglers" who disrupt the unity of the Church by professing the Church limited to Africa. Augustine was preoccupied with the Donatist schism, which rent the Church during the fourth century. Donatists as a sect were born just after the horrible persecution under Diocletian (A. D. 303-305). Following this persecution some Christians had yielded to the pressure and gave up their Scriptures and devotional objects to Roman authorities. They were later denounced by the Christians and were called *traditores*. In 312 Caecilian became Bishop of Carthage but some of his enemies declared his election invalid accusing one of his consecrating bishops Felix of being a *traditor*. A rival bishop was set up and in 313 Donatus was elected. From then onwards two opposing "churches" were functioning with great bitterness against each other. African nationalism played an important part in this fight. Donatus and his followers claimed that they were pure Africans, while Catholics looked to Rome. Donatists claimed that they were the "pure wheat" in the field, while the Catholics were the "weeds." The controversy became even more embroiled when the Donatists contended that the validity of a sacrament depended on worthiness of the minister, citing Cyprian as an example for the same idea. Augustine vehemently opposed this idea by stating the death of Christ brought redemption to the whole of humanity and all are made heirs of his salvation.<sup>29</sup> Thus the salvation of the universal Church is of prime importance as against the Donatist claim to be the "Church in Africa alone", and to this proposition Augustine refers in Psalm 22 in most of his second exposition.

His assault on the Donatists is based on the underlying principle of the universality of the Church as against the Donatist's claim that the Church is African. He affirms

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<sup>29</sup> See Warren Thomas Smith, *Augustine: his life and thought* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), pp. 95-98; Robert A. Markus, "Donatus, Donatism," in Allan D. Fitzgerald (ed.) *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 284-87.



that the “Church is spread throughout the world” to counter the Donatists’ view. Daniel Doyle rightly observes that one of the potential reasons why Augustine uses this phrase is to make his rhetorical antithesis against the claim of Donatists *sola in Africa* since their members are limited primarily to Africa.<sup>30</sup> Augustine dwells on this subject in the psalm by presenting his antithesis to the Donatists claim. He argues:

I wonder, brethren, if this psalm is read to-day among the party of Donatus too ... *Ye that fear the Lord, praise Him*. Wheresoever God is feared and praised, there is the Church of Christ. See, my brethren, whether in these days throughout the whole world it is said without a cause, *Amen* and *Hallelujah*. Is not God feared there? Is not God praised there? Donatus had gone out, and says, “He is altogether not feared, the whole world is lost.” Without any reason thou sayest, The whole world is lost. Has then a small portion only remained in Africa? Doth Christ then say nothing, whereby to stop these men’s mouths? doth He say nothing, whereby to pluck out the tongues of such as speak thus? Let us see, if haply we may find. Still it is said to us, *In the midst of the Church*: He speaketh of our Church.<sup>31</sup>

Again Augustine clarifies the phrase: “Church is spread throughout the world” in his exposition of the psalm in verse 25 and gives his direct answer to Donatus’ claim:

*In the great Church will I confess Thee*. Now here I suppose He has begun to touch the quick. The *great Church*, Brethren, what is it? Is a scanty portion of the earth the great Church? The great Church is the whole world. Now if one would wish to gainsay Christ, “Tell us, Thou hast said, *In the great Church I will confess Thee*: what great Church? Thou art reduced to a morsel of Africa, the whole world Thou hast lost: Thou hast shed Thy Blood for the whole, but Thou hast suffered from the invader.”<sup>32</sup>

In another place in verse 27 of the psalm, Augustine continues his argument from verse 25 against the Donatists’ narrow view of the Church. He passionately argues:

*All the borders of the earth shall remember themselves and be turned to the Lord*. See here, brethren! Why ask ye of me, what answer we should give to Donatus’ party? Look at the Psalm: both among us it is read to-day, and among them it is read to-day. Let us write it on our foreheads, let us go forth with it, let not our tongue keep silence, let it repeat the words: “See, Christ hath suffered; see, the Merchant displayeth His gains; see, the price which He gave, His Blood was shed. In a scrip He bare our price: He was smitten with a spear, the scrip was rent, and the price of the whole world flowed forth. What answerest thou, O heretic? Is it not the price of the whole world? Hath Africa only been redeemed? Thou darest not say, ‘The whole world was redeemed, but is lost.’”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Daniel E. Doyle, “Spread throughout the World: Hints on Augustine’s Understanding of Petrine Ministry,” *J ECS* 13: 2 (2005), pp. 233-46.

<sup>31</sup> St. Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, Vol. I (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1847), pp. 151, 158.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p. 159.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 161.



Augustine repeats his argument to defend his claim on the universal Church by repeating the words “all the borders of the earth” from the psalm until his completion of the second exposition of Psalm 22. All through he reiterates his claim very strongly and concludes that his message of the universal Church is the message of the psalm itself.

Augustine’s allegorical interpretation of the psalm is very obvious throughout his exposition. He consciously allegorizes the terms in the psalm either with Church or Christ or occasionally with the Jewish nation and the people connected to the passion of Jesus Christ. Some examples from his first exposition of Psalm 22 in this regard are:

*Since Thou art He Who drew Me out of the womb. Since Thou art He Who drew Me, not only out of that Virgin womb, but also out of the womb of the Jewish nation; ... My hope from My mother’s breasts. My hope, O God, not from the time I began to be fed by the milk of the Virgin’s breasts; for it was even before; but from the breasts of the Synagogue, as I have said, out of the womb, Thou hast drawn Me, that I should not suck in the customs of the flesh ... As a ravening and roaring lion. As a lion, whose ravening is, that I was taken and led; and whose roaring, Crucify, Crucify.... I will offer My vows in the sight of them that fear Him. I will offer the sacraments of My Body and Blood in the sight of them that fear Him.*<sup>34</sup>

In some places Augustine saw the literal fulfilment of the words in the psalm in the passion of Christ and in the New Testament usage of the psalm:

*They pierced My hands and feet. They pierced with nails My hands and feet. They numbered distinctly all My bones. They numbered distinctly all My bones, while extended on the wood of the Cross, ... They divided My garments for themselves, and cast the lot upon My vesture.... The generation to come shall be declared to the Lord. The generation of the New Testament shall be declared to the honour of the Lord. And the heavens shall declare His righteousness. And the Evangelists shall declare His righteousness.*<sup>35</sup>

At times Augustine explains the verses of the psalm in relation to the human and divine natures of Jesus Christ in an interesting way. This is clear when he talks about verse 6:

*But I am a worm, and no man. A worm, and no man; for man is a worm also: but He is a worm and no man. How no man? Because God. Why then did He so abase Himself as to say, a worm? It is because a worm is born of the flesh without coition, as Christ of the Virgin Mary? Both a worm even, and yet no man. Why a worm? Because mortal, because born of*

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 145,146, and 148.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 147,149.

the flesh, because born without coition. Why not a man? Because *the Word was in the beginning, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*<sup>36</sup>

While talking about the cry of abandonment in the opening verse of the psalm and its relationship to Jesus' cry on the cross, Augustine is of the view that God had not forsaken Christ because he is God himself. But the words of Jesus on the cross can mean that Christ bears the penalty of human sins. He comments:

[W]hilst hanging on the Cross, sustaining also the person of the old man, whose mortality He bare. For our old man was nailed together with Him to the Cross. ... For these are not the words of righteousness, but of my sins.<sup>37</sup>

Augustine at times stretches his interpretation of the psalm in plausible terms and creates a space for improvised reading. This is clearly seen in his interpretation of verse 17c:

*They pierced My hands and My feet. Then the wounds made the scars whereof the doubting disciple handled, the same who said, Unless I shall put my fingers into the scars of His wounds, I will not believe: whereupon He said to him, Come, thou hard of belief, put thy hand: and he put his hand, and cried out, My Lord, and My God.*<sup>38</sup>

Although the gospels do not record that Thomas had put his hand in, it is assumed by Augustine that it happened.

Like Theodoret, Augustine depicts the human side of Jesus in the content of the psalm while dealing with the first part of the psalm. Christ suffers as a human being as a scorn of men and outcast of the people. He states:

[T]he Lord was scourged, and there was none to help; He was defiled with spittle, and there was none to help; He was smitten with buffetings, and there was none to help; He was crowned with thorns, there was none to help; He was raised on the tree, there was none to deliver; ... See what the Lord suffers, take heed ye Christians: *The scorn of men, and the outcast of the people.*<sup>39</sup>

Augustine principally focuses his exposition on Psalm 22 as a platform for a contextualized polemic against the ecclesial problems of his day. He comes up with an interpretation of the psalm in the light of its literal fulfilment in the passion of Jesus Christ and allegorizes the words of the psalm in relation to the universal

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p. 154.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 144.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 156.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 154-55.

Church, the Jewish nation and people involved in the passion and even the Eucharist. Augustine depicts the human side of Jesus in and through the words of the psalmist. On one occasion Augustine stretched his interpretation to provide an improvised reading of the New Testament parallel related to the psalm. The salvation offered to the entire world (universal Church) is the main thrust of Augustine's exposition of the psalm. Augustine saw the content of the psalm which corresponds to his historical and ecclesial situation.

Augustine's explanation of the psalm based on God's salvation for all human beings, the suffering of Christ for the redemption of the entire world is a crucial point that is helpful to Dalit Christians in their interpretation of Psalm 22. For Dalits the universal redemption of Christ is a focal point as they are denied their dignity and personhood in this world. The gospel message that in Christ there is neither low nor high caste is a great boon to their wretched life as low caste people. Moreover, Christ's human suffering as a scorn of men and as an outcast among his own people fits with the situation of Dalits as they see in the same way as Augustine saw in the psalm. The allegorizing tendency of Augustine can well be noticed in the case of the Dalit Christian interpretation. Augustine's observations on the close parallels between the words of the psalm and the words in gospel narratives are similar to Dalits' interpretation in connecting the psalm with the New Testament. Even his improvised reading of the psalm on one occasion finds its similarity with a Dalit reading.

If we take Augustine's exposition of the psalm as point of comparison for a genuine dialogue with a Dalit Christian interpretation then he fits well within the position summarized above. We shall return to the details of this discussion in chapter 10 below.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

During the Early Christian period the interpretation of Psalm 22 was taken as a text that has a message to their context. The interpretative mechanisms adopted by these Early Church Fathers do not separate the meaning of the psalm and its application to their contextual needs. The Antiochene father Theodoret interpreted the psalm as a prophecy of David about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. True to his

Antiochene persuasion Theodoret located the content of the psalm in the “actual” life of David, but was moderate in his position to accommodate the psalm for Christological interpretation. The enemies described by the psalmist are taken to mean some “real” figures from the life of Christ. Theodoret highlights the human passion and suffering in the psalm that is comparable to the suffering of the human Jesus. The overall impact created by Theodoret that the psalm is a prophecy of David fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in itself speaks of some relevance of his interpretation with the contemporary Dalit Christian reading. Although Theodoret was not actively engaged in reading the psalm with his context or readers, at certain points he used the psalm to admonish the Jews in the midst of the heresies he faced in his Church. His explanation of Jews and Gentiles as “bulls” and “dogs” can be seen in this direction. Certain features of his reading of the psalm like: the psalm as a reflection of David’s life and prophecy about Christ, the suffering of Jesus in a human way, and the elevation of the status of Gentiles as God’s children resonate with Christian Dalit interpretation. We shall return back to this discussion in chapter 10 below.

Augustine was working in the context of widespread allegorical and typological interpretation of the Bible. He finds Psalm 22 to be a platform for his contextualized polemic against Donatists. He affirms that the psalm can be allegorically looked at in terms of the Church, the Jewish nation, and above all its prediction of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This prediction is very clearly seen in the accounts of gospels that present the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For Augustine the universal redemption of Christ and his salvation for all human beings is a focal point on which he defends his cause of the universal Church spread throughout the world. Like Theodoret Augustine too highlights the human suffering of Jesus as an outcast among his own people. Jesus’ suffering as a human being is filled with grief and agony. As was noted earlier, on one occasion Augustine’s interpretation provides a space for an improvised reading of a biblical passage in relation to the psalm. All these features summarised from Augustine’s treatment on Psalm 22 will be put in dialogue with Christian Dalit interpretation in chapter 10 below.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Modern Christian Interpretation of Psalm 22**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

In Chapters 2-4 we examined the non-Dalit interpretations of Psalm 22 and clearly indicated that they would be taken as dialogue partners with a Christian Dalit interpretation of the psalm discussed in chapters 6-9. Chapter 2 examined the historical critical mode of the Hebrew text with the general features like form, setting, and structure. In that chapter we discussed the traditional biblical scholarly treatment of the psalm highlighting the form and poetic elements of the text. We concluded that the lament/praise and distress/deliverance themes are articulated in the first and second part of the psalm respectively. Both the parts are well knit together structurally and thematically and one cannot be understood without the other.

In addition to the historical critical examination of Psalm 22, in chapter 2 scholars from the West interpreted the psalm in the light of its possible implications and as a psalm relevant to its subsequent application once its historical meaning is reconstructed. As noted largely in chapters 3 and 4 in every adoption and application, the psalm was read bearing in mind a particular purpose. In the same light we intend to select two commentators from European and North American backgrounds and examine their contribution. The present chapter will therefore examine the contributions of Franz Delitzsch, whose three volume commentary on the Book of Psalms was published in German in 1873-74 and Esther M. Menn, whose article on Psalm 22 was published in 2000 in order to take them as potential dialogue partners with a Dalit Christian interpretation. The reason for the selection of the two scholars for our discussion of Psalm 22 is three fold. First, both of them have common interest in Judaism and Jewish-Christian dialogue. This is reflected in their treatment of the psalm at several points, sometimes explicitly and at times implicitly. Second, the two interpreters give an adequate treatment on the New Testament usage of Psalm 22 in order to show its importance in the Christian tradition. Third, the two scholars'

discussion of the psalm points towards the direction that lament poems like Psalm 22 continue to engage contemporary readers like Dalit Christians, because of their secondary association with exemplary individuals in the history of interpretation. Before actually discussing their treatment of the psalm proper, a brief description of their interpretive context will be presented.

## **5.1 Franz Delitzsch**

5.1.1 Delitzsch's social and religious context: Franz Delitzsch was born in Leipzig in 1813 and studied at the University of Leipzig. After his initial dilemma of choosing between an academic career and mission to Jews, he became a *Privatdozent* in Leipzig in 1842. In 1846 Delitzsch succeeded Hofmann in Rostock. From 1850 to 1867 Delitzsch occupied a chair in Erlangen, before returning to Leipzig, where he died in 1890.<sup>1</sup> During his lifetime he fought against anti-Semitism. As a devout Christian he proselytized among the Jews, wrote several pamphlets for that purpose and made a new translation of the New Testament into Hebrew published in 1877. In 1863 he edited a missionary magazine (*Saat und Hoffnung*) for the support of Jewish conversion to Christianity and founded a Jewish missionary college for training missionary workers among Jews in Leipzig as *Institutum Judaicum* later renamed as *Institutum Delitzschianum* after his death.<sup>2</sup>

On the whole Delitzsch's exegesis of the Old Testament followed a traditional and conservative pattern of interpretation although he modified his position in his later writings by accepting "source theory" of biblical criticism. To illustrate his conservative position, he saw Isaiah 53 in relation to the vicarious suffering of Christ. The servant is not the object of divine punishment as a servant of God. But when the servant identifies himself with sinners he "subjects himself to the divine wrath, 'which is the invariable correlative of human sin.'"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century England and Germany* (London: SPCK, 1984), pp. 113-20.

<sup>2</sup> Mordecai Breuer, "Delitzsch, Franz," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* Vol. 5 (Jerusalem: Keter Publications, 1971), pp. 1474-75.

<sup>3</sup> Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism*, p. 114.



Delitzsch was influenced by Anton Günther's speculative philosophy which is consistently visible in all his biblical exposition. In his important work *System of Biblical Psychology* produced in 1855, Delitzsch combines his work as philologist, exegete, theologian and philosopher. One of the aims of this work was to show the unity of the Bible "from the beginning of creation to the doctrine of the last things."<sup>4</sup>

For Delitzsch, the history of redemption, beginning in the Old Testament, points towards reconciliation. For instance, the "Protoevangelium of Genesis 3.15 contained the whole gospel, and pointed to Jesus the Son of God. So the Old Testament recorded the advance of Christ towards the purpose of his incarnation."<sup>5</sup>

Delitzsch discusses the messianic purport of the psalms as something fundamental to our Christian understanding. He maintains that as the author of the psalms, David is typical of the coming messiah and his words are to be taken as prophetic of the coming Jesus in whom all the words expressed in some psalms are fulfilled. Thus Delitzsch depicts a class of psalms as "Messianic in a typical prophetic sense." In such psalms David uses "hyperbolical expressions, which were not to become full historical truth until they became so in Christ."<sup>6</sup>

Delitzsch's explanation of the nature of messianic psalms implies his concern to convert Jews to Christianity. For this purpose he clarifies his position on the God of the Old Testament and the expected messiah in Jesus Christ.

For the proclamation of redemption contained in the Old Testament runs in two parallel lines: the one has as its termination the Anointed of Jahve, who rules over all nations from out of Zion, the other, the LORD Himself, sitting above the Cherubim, to whom the whole earth pays homage. These two lines do not meet in the Old Testament; it is the history of the fulfilment of prophecy that first makes it clear that Parousia of the Anointed One and the Parousia of Jahve are one and the same.<sup>7</sup>

Delitzsch's explanation of Psalm 22 falls within the framework discussed above.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 117.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 120.

<sup>6</sup> F. Delitzsch, *Psalms I*, p. 93.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 91.

5.1.2 Delitzsch's explanation of the psalm: Delitzsch ascribes the authorship of the psalm to David and his context. It is the psalm written by the king when he was persecuted by Saul. Delitzsch maintains on the basis of 1 Samuel 23: 25f, that David's sorrow at the time when he was persecuted by Saul may have really been reflected in the lament section of Psalm 22.<sup>8</sup> At the same time Delitzsch notes that Psalm 22, in its first part, "coincides with the passion of Jesus Christ, and the second with the consequences that have resulted from His resurrection."<sup>9</sup>

Delitzsch divides the psalm into three major sections vv 2-12, 13-22 and 23-32 as equal parts, consisting of 21, 24 and 21 lines in each section. The details of his description of the psalm can be noted below.

In the first section of vv 2-12, through his disconsolate cry of anguish, the psalmist in verses 2 and 3 begins his lamentation over his prolonged abandonment by God. The word למה (why) is not an expression of impatience and despair, but of surprise and yearning. The sufferer in the psalm feels that he is rejected by God and the feeling of divine wrath looms around him. Yet the psalmist knows that he is united with God in fear and love. However, the psalmist knows that his present situation is in contradiction to the normal expectation, and thus the psalmist put the plaintive question: why have you forsaken me? In verse 2 the words "far from my salvation" and "are the words of my loud cry" depict a gulf between the two. Since God does not answer him, the psalmist cries unceasingly. In verses 4-6 the psalmist reminds Yahweh of the contradiction between his helplessness and the readiness of Yahweh to help. The word וְאַתָּה (but you) is a circumstantial clause which sets forth an argument that is in contradiction to what the psalmist is undergoing at present. The expression "you are holy" is a "self-attestation of God, who, as the Holy One, always from the remotest time acknowledged them that honoured him, in opposition to their persecutors, and justified their trust and vindicated the honour of His name, the suppliant brings to remembrance in vv. 5, 6."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 372-74.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 374.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 383.

Following this the psalmist complains about his pathetic situation in verses 7-9 in order that Yahweh's help may come speedily. These verses reflect severe affliction of the psalmist beyond all possibility of recovery. All the words in verse 7 are re-echoed in the second part of Isaiah. The word 'worm' can be found in Isa 41:14. The features of suffering explained by the psalmist can be found in the picture of the servant of God in Isa 49:7, 53:3 and more particularly in 52:14. But there is a difference between Isaianic passages and the psalm, argues Delitzsch: "here (Psalm 22), however, the salient point of the comparison is not the bleeding appearance, but the so utterly defenceless and the so thoroughly ignominious suffering."<sup>11</sup> In verse 12 the word **יָדָע** affirms the real situation of loving relationship between God and the psalmist for which his enemies mock him. The psalmist here affirms his close and firm relationship between him and Yahweh from his childhood, even from the time he was in his mother's womb. The psalmist ends this section of petition by calling on God to recognise that his need is pressing and that no one except Yahweh can help and save him from the present trouble.<sup>12</sup>

At the beginning of the second section of the psalm (13-22) the psalmist describes the perils of his inner and outward life, and so relieves his heart. The psalmist describes his enemies as 'bulls' and 'strong bulls of Bashan.' Delitzsch notes that the ancients measured the instincts of the animal world by the ethical norms of human nature.<sup>13</sup> After describing the enemies in animal metaphors the psalmist now describes (15-16) his situation as if he is already dead. The entire description of the body parts indicates the consequence of the psalmist's outward distress. This distress is so severe that now the psalmist brings his charge against God as the one responsible for his trouble and the one who makes his bed in death.

The content of verses 17-19 refer back to verse 12, the psalmist here describes more vividly his predicament. Concerning the word **כְּאֵרִי** (literally 'like a lion') Delitzsch proposes two possibilities: first, selecting the point of attack, the enemies of the

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 384.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 385-86.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. 387.

psalmist make the round of his hands and feet, just as a lion makes the round of his prey, upon which the lion throws itself to attack as soon as the prey resists; second, standing round about him like lions, the enemies of the psalmist make him defenceless to his hands, escape impossible to his feet.<sup>14</sup> Applying this word to David, Delitzsch proposes to read the word as **כְּאָרִי** “then 17 c, as applied to David, and perhaps with the comparison of his foes to assailing dogs still present to the poet’s mind, declares that the miscreants have deprived him of the free use of his hands and feet by piercing them, so that he cannot escape and is abandoned to their horrible lusts.”<sup>15</sup>

The description of the suffering by the psalmist has now reached its climax. With the introduction of the word **וְאֵתֶּה** in verse 20, the sufferer now turns his entire attention to Yahweh from all the tortures of his enemies. Regarding the word **עֲנִיתִנִּי** (you have answered me), Delitzsch along with S. R. Driver Delitzsch notes that it is a *perfect confidentiae*, a formula that even while the petitioner is praying there arises in his mind the assurance that his prayer is answered.<sup>16</sup>

The third section (vv 23-32) begins with the great plaintive prayer concluding with thanks and hope. In the assurance of being answered, the vow of thanksgiving is followed. The psalmist talks about the salvific act of God among his brothers and in the entire congregation. In verse 24 the preamble is set for the community experience of God’s deliverance.<sup>17</sup> In verse 25 the psalmist affirms that he suffered God’s wrath, now his situation is transformed and he can experience the love of God’s helping hand. The word **עָנֹת** means bending, bowing down, suffering, from **עָנָה**, the proper verb for describing the passion. Further, Delitzsch finds parallel expressions in Isaiah 53:4,7 where the Servant of God is represented as **מַעֲנָה** and

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 389-90.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 392. Delitzsch following Baethgen notes that the word **כְּאָרִי** “is to be understood of the gaping wounds, which are made in the sufferer’s hands and legs and which stare him in the face like holes.”

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 395.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*.

נִעְנָה and Zechariah 9:9 where the Servant of God is introduced as עֶבְדִּי and נוֹשָׁע.

The psalmist now declares that his affliction is over and his petition is heard by God.<sup>18</sup>

After the end of the proclamation of thanksgiving, the psalmist now looks towards the future in verses 26-27 with great anticipation. This anticipation is filled with the joy of deliverance thus sharing his fellowship with the עֲנָנִים and a great feast in the presence of Yahweh; “it is to be a feast for which they thank God, who has bestowed it upon them by means of this delivered one.”<sup>19</sup> The expression “may your hearts live for ever” may refer to the fact that the refreshment of this meal will endure eternally. This expression may also indicate material and spiritual blessing.<sup>20</sup>

The concluding section (28-32) of the psalm not only shows the results that follow the deliverance of the petitioner, but transcend David’s own time. “As the fruit of his proclamation of that which Jahve has done to and for him, the sufferer looks for the conversion of all the peoples.”<sup>21</sup> ‘God rules all the nations’ (verse 29) is the proclamation confirmed by the conversion of the heathen and this is a realization of the kingdom of God.

The expression יֹרְדֵי עָפָר (those who go down to dust) means, “those who by reason of care and want are well nigh already dead, these also (and how thankfully precisely these) go down upon their knees, because they are esteemed worthy of being guests at his table.”<sup>22</sup> God had accomplished what he had proposed (עָשָׂה the work of God’s salvation in verse 32) and he had anointed David and Jesus Christ to be the mediators of this salvation by leading the former to the suffering and latter to the cross and resurrection.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 396.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 397.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 398.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 400.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p. 402.

5.1.3 Delitzsch's application of the psalm: Delitzsch makes a conscious attempt to relate the psalm to the New Testament and in particular the passion of Jesus Christ. Delitzsch weaves together the important elements of the psalm with the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on the cross. True to his zeal to convert the Jews to Christianity Delitzsch applies the psalm to David in the first instance and then to Jesus Christ.

On a general level Delitzsch relates Psalm 22 as a psalm of fulfilment in the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross. He writes about the reciprocal relationship between Psalm 22 and the description of the suffering of Jesus Christ by the gospel writers:

It is the agonizing situation of a crucified one that is pictorially and faithfully presented to us in vv. 15-18: the spreading out of the limbs of the naked body, the torturing of the hands and the feet, and the burning thrust which the Redeemer, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, announced in the cry  $\delta\iota\psi\omega$  (John xix. 28). Men who reviled Him and shook their head at Him passed by His cross (Matt. xxvii. 39) just as v. 8 says; scorners cried to Him: let the God in whom He trusts deliver Him (Matt. xxvii. 43), just as v. 9 says; His garments were divided and lots were cast for His coat (John xix. 23f.) in order that v. 19 of our psalm might be fulfilled. The third last of the seven words of the dying One,  $\text{Η} \lambda \iota \eta \lambda \iota \kappa \tau \lambda$ . (Matt. xxvii. 46, Mark xv. 34) is the first word of our Psalm and the appropriation of the whole.<sup>24</sup>

Concerning the cry of abandonment in the second verse of the psalm and its relationship with the cross, Delitzsch is of the opinion that although it is common in both cases, nevertheless it applies uniquely in the case of Jesus Christ.

The crucified One's desertion by God, however, is altogether unique, and must not be measured by that of David and of other sufferers who thus complain when they find themselves exposed to sore trial. The element which is common to His case and theirs is this, that behind the wrath which is felt there is hidden the love of God, which faith holds fast, and that, regarded in himself, he who thus complains is not an object of wrath, if for no other reason than this, that even while feeling the wrath he maintains his fellowship with God. The crucified One is even to His latest breath the Holy One of God, and the propitiation, for which He offers Himself, is God's own eternal gracious will, which is now being realised in the fullness of the times; but seeing that He submits Himself with the sin of His people and of the whole humanity to God's judgment, it cannot be spared Him to experience God's wrath against sinful humanity as if He were personally guilty; and out of the infinite depths of this tasting of wrath, which in His case rests upon no mere appearance but upon the sternest reality, there comes His complaint, which penetrates the wrath and appeals to God's love,  $\eta \lambda \iota \eta \lambda \iota \lambda \epsilon \mu \alpha \sigma \alpha \beta \alpha \chi \theta \alpha \nu \alpha \iota$ ,<sup>25</sup>

In this regard Delitzsch notes that the word  $\text{שׂאגתי}$  (my cry/my lament) [far from] in verse 2 b refers to the sense of dark hour of despair. Jesus Christ utters his cry of

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 375.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*.



abandonment in the context that may be similar to the context described by the psalmist in the psalm.<sup>26</sup>

Delitzsch finds more parallel evidence in the psalm with that of the crucifixion scene of Jesus Christ in verses 17c and 19 of the psalm. In these verses Delitzsch seeks close parallels between the life of David and the cross of Christ. Even though the description in these verses transcends David's historical reality nevertheless it is integrally connected to his situation. The strong Jewish-Christian link may be deduced from this description of Delitzsch. The words **כְּאַרְי** in verse 17c and **בְּגָדֵי** (my garments), **לְבוּשִׁי** (my cloak) in verse 19 seems to be relevant for Delitzsch as he applies them to the context of David and the cross of Jesus Christ.

The fulfilment by the nailing of the hands (at least the binding fast) of the feet of the crucified One is exceedingly plain. Not only here is it prophesied that the coming Christ will be murderously pierced, but also in Isa. liii. 5, where He is said to be pierced through (**מְחַלְלֵל**) because of our sins,... In v. 19 a new feature is added to those that transcend the condition of David: they part my garments among them ... This never happened to David, or at least not in the literal sense of his words, in which it happened to Christ. V. 19 *a* and 19 *b* have literally fulfilled themselves in Him: the parting of the **בְּגָדִים** in the soldiers apportioning His **ἑμᾶρτια** in four parts among themselves, casting of lots upon the **לְבוּשׁ** in their not dividing the **χιτῶν ἄρραφος**, but casting lots for it (John xix. 23 *f.*)... The case stands with v. 19 of this Psalm exactly as with Zech. ix. 9 (cf. Matt. xxi. 5); in regard to it also the fulfilment has realised that which is apparently identical from both sides of the synonymous expression.<sup>27</sup>

Concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ in relation to the psalm Delitzsch writes:

The Psalm so sets before our eyes not merely the suffering of the crucified One, but also the redemption of the world that resulted from His resurrection and the sacramental appropriation of that redemption,<sup>28</sup>

In order to substantiate his talk as to the actual fulfilment of the psalm in the light of the resurrection of Christ, Delitzsch makes his reference to Hebrews 2:11f which quotes Psalm 22:23 and writes:

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 382.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 392-93.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 375.

And the Epistle to the Hebrews (ii. 11f.) quotes v. 23 as the words of Christ, in order to show that He is not ashamed to call those His brethren, whose sanctifier God has appointed Him to be, just as the risen One has actually done (Matt. xxvii. 10, John xx. 17).<sup>29</sup>

Several times Delitzsch talks of Psalm 22 as the Davidic psalm of prophecy fulfilment in the suffering and cross of Jesus Christ again to imply his concern to convert Jews into Christianity. In other words, Delitzsch thinks that in the psalm David's suffering is prefigured or typified to Jesus Christ's suffering on the cross:

For as God the Father fashions the history of Jesus Christ in conformity with His own counsel, so His spirit fashions also the statements of David, the type of the coming One, regarding himself, with a view to that history. By means of this Spirit, which is at once the Spirit of God and of the coming Christ, David's typical history, as he narrates it in his Psalms and more especially in this one, has acquired that ideal depth, transfiguration and intensity, in virtue of which it is far more than a mere statement of typical facts in divine counsel, and grows to be the word of prophecy; so that, to a certain extent, it may rightly be said that Christ speaks here through David, in as much as the Spirit of Christ speaks through him and makes the prefigurative suffering of His ancestor the means whereby His own future passion is represented.<sup>30</sup>

The above quotations of Delitzsch reveal that his interest in Jewish-Christian relations is something different from Esther Menn. For Delitzsch the words of David in the psalm cannot become full "historical truths" until they are fulfilled in Christ. As was stated earlier, Delitzsch underscores that the words of the psalm in verse 19 better fit Christ than David. This indicates his view that the reference to David in the psalm is somehow inadequate, and therefore finds its subsequent fulfilment in Christ. In line with his missionary zeal to convert Jews to Christianity Delitzsch explained the psalm in relation to David and then proceeded to show how the words of the psalm better fit with the passion and resurrection of Christ.

In the concluding section of the psalm Delitzsch draws our attention to the universal application of the psalm. God's rule over all the nations (verse 29) is the confirmation of the conversion of all people and it is the positive sign of God's kingdom. God's salvation proclaimed by the psalmist finds its climax in the cross and resurrection of Christ. The message of salvation is thus mediated through David

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 377.

and Christ. Once again Delitzsch's discussion takes place in the context of Jewish conversion to Christianity. He writes:

That God has accomplished what He proposed to Himself, when He anointed the son of Jesse and the Son of David to be the mediators of His work of salvation; that He has accomplished it by leading the former through suffering to the throne and by making the cross the ladder whereby the latter ascended to heaven: this is the purport of the preparatory gospel as well as that of the gospel in its fulfilment, the purport of the divine proclamation which is transmitted from generation to generation.<sup>31</sup>

To conclude, Delitzsch's interpretation of Psalm 22, true to his social and religious context of interpreting the Old Testament as the beginning of redemption history, looks forward to Jesus the Son of God, and reads Psalm 22 as a typical psalm of the prophecy of Christ's suffering on the cross and some allusions to the consequences of his resurrection can also be found in the last part of it. The psalm refers to Christ in so far as it is typified or prefigured in the light of the suffering experience of David. Delitzsch's explanation of the psalm is done with the interest in Jewish-Christian relations. For Delitzsch, the psalm finds its subsequent fulfilment in Christ even when it has its historical beginning in David. From this discussion it can be deduced that Delitzsch wants to convert Jews to Christianity.

## **5.2 Esther M. Menn**

5.2.1 Menn's interpretive context: Esther Marie Menn is an associate professor of Old Testament at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, USA. Her special interest is in the biblical figure of King David, and at the moment she is working on two books about David—one on David and the Temple and the second on David and the psalms in Rabbinic Literature. She is deeply committed to Jewish-Christian dialogue and is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's (ELCA) consultative panel on Lutheran-Jewish relations. She was a delegate to the Lutheran World Federation's international consultation on anti-semitism and anti-Judaism in Budapest, Hungary in September 2002.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 402.

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.lstc.edu/people/faculty/individual/menn.html>

Menn is very conscious of interpreting biblical texts in the light of both their historical context and the context of their contemporary readers. In her book *Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in Ancient Jewish Exegesis: Studies in Literary Form and Hermeneutics* (a revised version of her doctoral dissertation) published in 1997, Menn shows how Genesis 38 was interpreted in the writings of three Jewish communities—*Testament of Judah*, *Targum Neofiti*, and *Genesis Rabba*. In her work she notes that the same biblical text is interpreted in different ways from the diverse perspectives of historically situated readers. Through her exegetical work she argues that a text always has gaps and the readers fill them according to their situation. Her main contention is: meaning emerges from the dialogue between text and reader. She comments:

The early Jewish interpreters responsible for the *Testament of Judah*, *Targum Neofiti*, and *Genesis Rabbah* have indeed made breaches, or openings, into an ancient and somewhat puzzling narrative in order to interpret much later values and religious ideals.<sup>33</sup>

This work of Menn affirms how the readers in their dialogue with a biblical text fill in the gaps according to their context. This also indicates how the normative function of a biblical text plays a vital role in the living religious communities. The meaning of a biblical text is radically altered or becomes more dynamic when put in dialogue with the reader other than its ‘original’ context.

Menn treats Psalm 22 in the same light discussed above. Menn is concerned about the interpretative context and the identity of the individual in Psalm 22. She writes: “The Psalms appear to be incapable of entirely surrendering themselves to the extraordinary figures associated with them in the history of biblical interpretation; rather, these poems continue to engage ordinary believers, albeit in more complex ways, because of their secondary associations with exemplary individuals.”<sup>34</sup> Menn has selected Psalm 22 as a case study to explain this thesis in order to examine an enduring potential engagement between the ordinary individual and the psalms. For this purpose Menn first of all explains the possible original ritual setting of psalm in

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<sup>33</sup> Esther M. Menn, *Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in Ancient Jewish Exegesis: Studies in Literary Form and Hermeneutics* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 367.

<sup>34</sup> E. Menn, “No Ordinary Lament.” p. 303.

detail and then examines Psalm 22 as Esther's prayer in the classic rabbinic commentary on the Psalms known as *Midrash Tehillim*. Then she compares this interpretation of *Midrash Tehillim* with the more widely known interpretation of Psalm 22 as the final words of Jesus in the New Testament. Prior to this Menn also discusses the point that the Davidic superscription of the psalm is important as it sets a stage to understand the psalm in a concrete 'historical' setting and it further explains how the meaning of the psalm is transformed when it is later associated with other individuals like Esther or Jesus. Thus by dealing with the psalm in the framework of David-Esther-Jesus Christ Menn initiates a Jewish-Christian dialogue discussion.

#### 5.2.2 Ritual context of Psalm 22:

Psalm 22 is described as an individual lament and only the first part of the psalm (verses 2-22) contains elements associated with this genre. Menn notes that the two parts (verses 2-22 and 23-32) are knit together as the thematic movement of lament and praise by means of the development of overarching themes.

Regarding the nature of the original ritual context/setting associated with the psalm, Menn looks for some internal evidence within the psalm itself and from the other individual laments in the Psalter. Two examples are brought to our attention in this regard. First, based on the second part of the psalm, Psalm 22 is regarded as a musical component of a ritual that marked the close of a lengthy period of personal distress. In this situation, the psalm accompanied a thanksgiving sacrifice, either at the Jerusalem Temple or at some other religious centre, with the fulfilment of a vow made at the time of sore need, or the performance of the psalm itself by professionals served as the fulfilment of an individual's vow to praise God publicly upon recovery. In either case, the psalm would serve not merely as an expression of personal gratitude, but as a public act to mark the fulfilment of restored personal vows, through which he would formally honour God as sovereign king. If this interpretation is accepted, the lament in the first part of the psalm serves as an introduction, as an evocation of past events that have been reversed by God in response to the psalmist's prayers remarks Menn. Second, Psalm 22 was performed by small groups as a ritual intended to promote the healing of community members who were suffering from

serious ailments. The concluding part of the psalm presents a visionary picture of anticipated restoration, including the vows of praise, as well as the praise offered to God by the entire world for his responsiveness to prayer.<sup>35</sup>

Because Psalm 22 is presented in metaphorical and hyperbolic language, the precise nature of the distress suffered by the individual who cries out to God for help must remain open to multiple interpretations. The psalm describes a world filled with jeering, bestial enemies, whose gestures cause the psalmist to be poured out like water, his heart to melt like wax, until he lies in the very dust of death. Menn argues that this vague stereotypical imagery appears to be a deliberate strategy that allows people facing any number of horrors to adopt the psalm for ritual use.<sup>36</sup>

As the individual's experience of suffering is described through the poetic language of the psalm, "it ceases to be felt as anomalous and isolated and assumes a shape of conventional literary form in a public setting." The individual in the psalm is gradually incorporated into the community of friends and family physically present at the psalm's ritual performance. The psalm in these concluding verses (28-32) extends "the community within which the individual lamenter finds himself beyond national, spatial, and temporal borders," to include all those in the future generations who acknowledge God's sovereignty.<sup>37</sup>

These insights prompted some scholars to argue for a specific representative figure behind the psalm, probably the individual as a royal figure. But Menn suggests that there is no strong evidence to support this view. Additionally such identification "obscures what appears to have been a more commonplace dynamic between the ordinary individual and the community, expressed through the contents and performance of the psalm: the reincorporation of the individual who is undergoing or had undergone the liminal experience of facing death alone into the larger community of those who praise God for answered prayer."<sup>38</sup> However, the dynamics of the relationship between the individual and the community expressed through the

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 307.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p. 308.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 309.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 310.



contents and performance of Psalm 22 change markedly, once the individual becomes identified as Esther or Jesus, remarks Menn.<sup>39</sup>

In order to advance her argument on the identity of the individual in the psalm as Esther or Jesus, Menn discusses briefly the supposed Davidic authorship of Psalm 22. While Menn accepts the ambiguity in the Davidic superscription, nevertheless she presses her point that the method of embellishing David's career through the poetic imagery of Psalm 22 (as done in *Midrash Tehillim* 22.2) "illustrates the creative potential of a psalm to transform the biblical narrative with which it becomes linked—a potential abundantly exploited in the interpretations of Psalm 22 that connects it to the biographies of Esther and Jesus."<sup>40</sup>

### 5.2.3 Psalm 22 and Esther's Duress in *Midrash Tehillim*:

The association of Psalm 22 with the Jewish queen was a late development in rabbinic Judaism, being entirely absent in earliest sources stemming from the tannaitic period (first to second centuries CE). By contrast, the understanding of Psalm 22 as Esther's prayer dominates interpretation of the psalm in the amoraic period (third to fifth centuries CE), and this interpretation appears prominently in *Midrash Tehillim*.<sup>41</sup>

The interpretation of Psalm 22 in *Midrash Tehillim* converts the secular Book of Esther into religious history, appropriate for inclusion in scripture. The discussion of the ancient phrases of Psalm 22 in relation to Esther's plight in *Midrash Tehillim* introduces "a religious character to the story by presenting its central character as a pious woman who speaks and acts according to the traditions of her ancestors."<sup>42</sup>

Two distinct parts of the commentary on Psalm 22 in *Midrash Tehillim* can be noticed: First part: *Midr. Teh.* 22.1-17 contains a collection of proems. Homiletic introductions to scriptural passages read liturgically in the synagogue service. Second part: *Midr. Teh.* 22:18-32 consists of verse-by-verse commentary on Psalm 22,

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 316.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

beginning with second actual verse (Ps 22:3) and continuing through most of the remaining verses of the psalm.<sup>43</sup>

The connections between Psalm 22 and the Jewish queen in *Midr. Teh.* are obvious as we note the following features:<sup>44</sup>

(a) Esther is identified more than once as the principal subject of Psalm 22, in the superscriptions: “‘Concerning the Hind of the Dawn’—this [refers to] Esther” (*Midr. Teh.* 22.1); “[Esther] decreed a three-day fast, and therefore it is said ‘Concerning the Hind of the Dawn,’ because she brought forth dawn out of darkness.” (*Midr. Teh.* 22.5). (b) Three prayers can be specifically noted in *Midr. Teh.* to see its integral connection with Psalm 22. First, Esther’s initial anguished cry, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” (Ps 22:2), is broken up into a series of exclamations uttered over the three-day period of the fast observed in Susa: “on the first day of a fast, one says, ‘my God’; on the second day, ‘My God’; only on the third day may one say ‘Why have you forsaken me?’ So it was only after Esther cried in a loud voice, ‘Why have you forsaken me?’ that her cry was heard.”<sup>45</sup> Second, a prayer attributed to Esther concerns not the fate of the Jewish people, but her own horrific life in the Persian court. The following prayer captures this point: “My God, [you were at] the Reed Sea. My God, [you were at] Sinai. Why have you forsaken me? Why should the order of the world, even the story of the matriarchs, turn out differently for me?”<sup>46</sup> Third, the most extended prayer encompasses Ps 22: 12-20. The setting of this prayer is clearly indicated in the commentary on Psalm 22:12, the opening petition: “Do not be far from me, for trouble is near, and there is no one to help”:

When [did Esther speak these words]? At the time when Ahasuerus decreed “to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate [all the Jews]” (Esth 3:13). At that time, Esther entered without permission, as it is said, “[Esther] stood in the [inner] court of the king’s house” (Esth 5:1)<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 318-19.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 319-26.

<sup>45</sup> *Midr. Teh.* 22.6 cited in E. Menn, “No Ordinary Lament.” p. 321.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.16 cited in E. Menn, “No Ordinary Lament.” p. 322.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.24 cited in E. Menn, “No Ordinary Lament.” p. 324.

(c) In contrast to these three extended interpretations of passages from the lament section of the Psalm 22:2-22 as Esther's prayers, little explicit correlation is made between the thanksgiving section (Psalm 22: 23-32) and the positive conclusion of the biblical story. As an exception to this, only one passage in the last section of the commentary on Psalm 22 in *Midr. Teh.* actually establishes a correlation between a verse from the psalm (v 27) and the behaviour of Esther and Mordecai after the Jews were granted reprieve.<sup>48</sup>

#### 5.2.4 Psalm 22 and Jesus' Passion in the New Testament:

Menn notes that the connection between Jesus and Psalm 22 within the church is much deeper and enduring than between Esther and the psalm within Judaism. It may be that the Early Christian interpretation of Psalm 22 may have influenced the later Jewish interpretation on Esther. In any case "the application of Psalm 22 to Jesus' story resembles its application to Esther's story in that the anonymous sufferer of the ancient liturgical composition is identified as a specific figure appearing much later in Israel's history."<sup>49</sup>

In the *Midrash Tehillim* the commentary on Psalm 22 follows the order of the psalm verses and is generally clearly demarcated from the citations of those verses. In the gospels by contrast the allusions to the psalm are integrated directly into the narratives of Jesus' passion and in Hebrews, into the discussion of the significance of crucifixion. In only one place there is a formal indication that a verse of a scripture is being cited (John 19: 24 cites Ps. 22: 19 as the scripture that is fulfilled), but in several cases we can notice an obvious quotation as it corresponds with the distinctive wording of the psalm (For instance, Mark 15: 34 and Matt. 27: 46 quote Ps. 22: 2). Menn notes that in comparison with the *Midrash Tehillim*, only a minority of verses of Psalm 22 appear as citations and allusions in the New Testament.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See *Ibid*, 22.32 for details. Also see E. Menn, "No Ordinary Lament." p. 327 mentions that "the three parts of Psalm 22:27 are understood as references to these inheritors: "the poor shall eat and be satisfied" refers to Mordecai and Esther, "those who seek after the LORD shall praise him" refers to the Torah students, and "may your heart live forever" refers to the rebuilding of the Temple, where God's eyes and heart remain perpetually (2 Chron 7:16)."

<sup>49</sup> E. Menn, "No Ordinary Lament." p. 328.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 329-30.

In contrast to *Midrash Tehillim*, which identifies three different contexts for passages from Psalm 22 as Esther's prayers, the New Testament provides only one context for Psalm 22 as Jesus' prayer, the cross.<sup>51</sup>

In the light of Jesus' citation of the first verse of the psalm, we may raise the question whether Mark and Matthew intended the whole psalm to be considered for Jesus' passion. Menn is of the view that, at least from the second century of the Common Era, Christian commentators on Psalm 22 assume that the entire psalm was meant to be related to Christ's passion.<sup>52</sup>

Apart from the direct quotation in Mark and Matthew of the opening verses of Psalm 22 as Jesus' words, another most striking instance is where the language of the psalm shapes the story of the dividing of Jesus' clothes by the soldiers. Each of the synoptic gospels describes the scene in the form of two summary statements: "They divide his clothes among themselves, casting lots for them."<sup>53</sup> Contrary to this, John develops the connection between the psalm and the passion in a distinctive fashion. The soldiers divided Jesus' clothes into four parts, one each, and cast lots for his tunic (John 19: 23-24). Menn argues that this may be seen in convention with Psalm 22:19 as a distinctive and sequential event. At the end of the soldier's actions John introduces the statement that Psalm 22:19 as a verse of scripture fulfilled and cites it verbatim, exactly as it appears in the Septuagint.<sup>54</sup>

Another prominent motif in the passion narratives that draws on the language of the Psalm 22 is the mockery of Jesus by his enemies. All the four gospels, but in particular the synoptic gospels, emphasize the derision and taunting that Jesus suffered from Jewish authorities,<sup>55</sup> Roman soldiers,<sup>56</sup> Herod and his guards (Luke 23:11), passers-by at Golgotha (Mark 15:29; Matt 27:39-40), and the criminals

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p. 330.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, p. 331. Menn cites Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, p. 49 as an example of this use of the psalm.

<sup>53</sup> See Mark 15: 24; Matt 27: 35 and Luke 23: 34.

<sup>54</sup> E. Menn, "No Ordinary Lament." p. 332.

<sup>55</sup> Mark 14:65; 15:31-32; Matt 26:67; 27:41-43; Luke 22:63; 23:35.

<sup>56</sup> Mark 15:16-20; Matt 27:27-31; John 19:2-3; Luke 23:36-37; Jesus is also taunted by the soldiers in *Gos. Pet.* 3:6-9.

executed beside him (Mark 15:32; Matt 27:44; Luke 23:39). These repeated descriptions of the words of mockery and taunting in the gospels can be found with the same motif in the Psalm 22:6-9, 13-14, 17-19. Sometimes there are instances of close verbal correspondence between the scenes in the synoptic gospels and in the Septuagint translation of Psalm 22:7-8.<sup>57</sup> “The most striking example is Matthew’s paraphrase of Psalm 22:9 (“He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him—let him save him, because he delights in him!” in the Septuagint) as the mocking words that the chief priests, scribes, and elders address to Jesus on the cross (“He relies on God, let him deliver [him] now, if he delights in him!” Matt 27:43)”.<sup>58</sup> In the synoptic gospels we see the repeated use of the single word that Jesus “saves” himself from the cross, which employs the same verb “to save” (σώζω) that appears throughout the Septuagint translation of Psalm 22.<sup>59</sup>

The application of Psalm 22 to Jesus, as in the case of *Midrash Tehillim* emphasizes verses from the lament section. Despite this emphasis, the quotation in Heb 2:12 (compare Ps 22:23) may indicate an allusion to the theme of resurrection. This is because of a “general correspondence between the overarching upswing of the gospel narratives with the resurrection, and the conclusion of the psalm with thanksgiving.”<sup>60</sup>

To sum up: Menn concludes that the lament section of the Psalm 22 is widely and explicitly used in the Esther story in *Midr. Teh.* identifying the first person voice of Psalm 22 as Esther’s voice as she prays. According to this interpretation, Esther’s prayer is concerned with the precarious situation that she and the Jewish people face within the Persian empire. Although the connection between Esther’s story and the thanksgiving section of Psalm 22 are less developed in *Midr. Teh.*, the appearance of

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<sup>57</sup> For example, Herod and his soldiers treat Jesus with “contempt” (ἐξουθενήσας, Luke 23:11; ἐξουθενήμα, Psalm 22:7); at Jesus leaders “scoff” (ἐξεμυκτηρίζον, Luke 23:35; ἐξεμυκτηρισαν, Psalm 22:8) and the criminals “taunt” (ὠνείδιζον, Mark 15:32 and Matt 27:44; ὠνειδος, Psalm 22:7). For more detailed discussion on the parallel between Septuagint translation of Psalm 22:7-8 and the scenes in the synoptic gospels see E. Menn, “No Ordinary Lament.” p. 333.

<sup>58</sup> E. Menn, “No Ordinary Lament.” p. 333.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 334.

a specific link in Ps 22:27 suggests that the entire psalm was read in the light of Esther.<sup>61</sup>

Regarding the connection between Psalm 22 and the passion of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, Menn notes that the two synoptic gospels explicitly quote the first line of the psalm as the last words of Jesus on the cross, and all the gospels develop the motif of dividing Jesus' clothes and jeering enemies at the cross by employing the language of the psalm. Although the explicit connections between the gospels and the lament section are more numerous than the thanksgiving section, the citation of a verse in Hebrews demonstrates that the correlation included the second part, "with its proclamation of God's response to the one who experiences suffering and abandonment, and its call for all the ends of the earth to recognize his sovereignty."<sup>62</sup>

By discussing the psalm in the light of David-Esther-Jesus Menn makes a move towards a Jewish-Christian dialogue. Her Christian interpretation of the psalm accommodates the Jewish significance and thus calls for an active interaction between the two and opens up to other contexts as well.

### **5.3 Significant Features of the Interpretation of Psalm 22 in Delitzsch and Menn**

As pointed above Delitzsch and Menn have one thing in common (with different motivation) namely, *those interested in Judaism*. It is beyond the scope of this research to get into the complexities of their concern for Judaism but general and brief observations would suffice to explain our point in so far it is related to Psalm 22. Although it is not explicitly stated by them certain features in their description of the psalm reflect their concern that works either for Jewish conversion to Christianity or to engage Jews in a dialogue with Christians.

Delitzsch's explanation that the psalm is the prophecy of David strongly supports this point. For this purpose Delitzsch puts strong emphasis on the contents of the psalm showing how it corresponds with the events from the life of David. Delitzsch's explanation that David's suffering was prefigured or typified in the life of Jesus Christ fitted well with his concern to convert Jews into Christianity. For Delitzsch

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, p. 327.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p. 335.



the words of the psalm make better sense in their subsequent fulfilment in Christ. As already noted Delitzsch, in his explanation of the last section (verses 28-32) of the psalm, refers to God's work of salvation that is accomplished both in the life of David and Jesus Christ. Both these figures are the mediators of this gospel proclamation (verse 32) of the psalm. Thus Delitzsch's treatment of the psalm moves towards his attraction of Jews to Christianity.

Esther Menn's treatment of Psalm 22 implies her overall concern for a Jewish-Christian dialogue. The duress of Esther explicated in Rabbinic Judaism using Psalm 22 as a base speaks about the application of the psalm through an exemplary figure that suffered and gained victory for her Jewish nation. Although not explicitly stated, the very selection of her Rabbinic Judaism story and the association of the Christian understanding of the cross in the New Testament with Psalm 22 speaks of her genuine concern. Unlike Delitzsch, Menn discusses the psalm in the overall framework of David-Esther-Jesus and points out a possibility that the psalm could foster a healthy climate for Jewish-Christian relations. Like Delitzsch Menn is not concerned with the conversion of the Jews to Christianity but to engage them in an active dialogue for a mutual benefit. For this purpose Menn underscores the importance of the secondary association of Psalm 22 within Judaism during Purim with evidence from medieval sources from eleventh century and the use of the psalm on Good Friday in the Christian tradition. By this she speaks of the common purpose for which the psalm was used in liturgical traditions. This use of the psalm suggests how God answers the prayers of suffering individuals in the affirmative without minimizing the experience of pain and abandonment.

Delitzsch and Menn discuss the question of *David as the author of the psalm*. For Delitzsch the events in the life of David are clearly reflected in the content of the psalm. David's sorrow and affliction when he was persecuted by Saul (1 Samuel 23: 25f) was taken as a basis for the correspondence between the psalm and life of David.<sup>63</sup> For Menn the question of Davidic authorship of the psalm is vital because it speaks of the potential identity of the individual through the content of the psalm.

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<sup>63</sup> F. Delitzsch, *Psalms I*, pp. 372-74.

Menn sees this as an extremely important point when the anonymous identity of the speaker is changed to Davidic authorship the psalm gets a specific identity. Later when Psalm 22 is understood in the light of David as the petitioning author in *Midrash Tehillim* the details of his hardships are linked with the content of the psalm.<sup>64</sup> In this way the creative potential of the psalm to transform the biblical narrative with which it is linked can be further noticed in the case of Jesus in the New Testament. The same process continues in other contexts when the individual identity of psalmist changes.<sup>65</sup> Thus even while Delitzsch and Menn's approach to the psalm have distinct contours their overall discussion of the Davidic association of the psalm implies their concern for a Jewish colouring of the psalm that can be put in dialogue with its Christian use. For Delitzsch the Davidic authorship serves as a starting point to convert Jews to Christianity and for Menn it is a point to foster a dialogue between Jews and Christians.

The two interpretations agree to the fact that the psalm is classified as an *individual lament set within a possible community context*. Delitzsch is of the view that Psalm 22 is a plaintive psalm, with shameful humiliation and the most fearful peril. The psalmist is connected with his community of his fellow-countrymen and the suffering of the individual has a strong connection with the history of redemption in the community context.<sup>66</sup> Esther Menn writes: "The ritual use of a lament such as Psalm 22, therefore, draws the individual into linguistic and conceptual identification between himself and the larger cultural group, which is reinforced by the individual's incorporation into the group of family and friends physically present in the psalm's ritual performance (especially in the concluding verses in Psalm 22: 28-32) ... In these ways, Psalm 22 reveals an integrating, collective dimension that belies its common description as an 'individual lament.'"<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> E. Menn, "No Ordinary Lament." pp. 313-316. Menn notes that David is not the only biblical figure linked with Psalm 22 in *Midrash Tehillim*. Other biblical figures related to the psalm include: Moses, Hezekiah, Esther and others.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> F. Delitzsch, *Psalms I*, pp. 372, 376, 395.

<sup>67</sup> E. Menn, "No Ordinary Lament." p. 309.

Concerning the *poetic structure of the psalm*, the two interpreters are of the view that the poet has worked through a structure that reflects the lament and thanksgiving elements. Delitzsch notes that the psalm has three sections (2-12, 13-22, 23-32) which are of symmetrical compass, consisting of 21, 24, and 21 lines. The poem speaks of David's "inmost heart" and as "lyric poetry." It grew "up on the soil and ground of his individual life and his individual feeling."<sup>68</sup> Menn maintains that the poet in Psalm 22 moves from the depths of despair to the heights of praise, from an experience of utter abandonment to the praise of God in the congregation, from an experience of alienation to the praise of God, who, despite his grandeur and majesty, answers the prayer of the afflicted individuals. The lament and thanksgiving parts of the psalm are thus well connected by means of the overarching upswing of the themes.<sup>69</sup>

The two interpreters are of the view that the *performative*<sup>70</sup> *dimension of the psalm* is of primary importance and which is why the psalm gets its prominence. In other words, the psalm has the ability to open up further a dynamic between the individual and the community when it is applied to different types of distress situations.

Delitzsch, all through his interpretation of the psalm, explains its performative dimension by ascribing it to David and yet subsequently every word spoken in the psalm is said to be applicable to the passion of Jesus Christ. Maintaining his argument on the prophetic character of the psalm, Delitzsch goes to the extent of writing, "it may be rightly said that Christ speaks here through David, inasmuch as the Spirit of Christ speaks through him and makes the prefigurative suffering of His ancestor the means whereby His own future passion is represented."<sup>71</sup> While talking about the messianic purport of the psalms Delitzsch points out that David is a type of coming of the messiah and David's words are to become full historical truths only in Jesus Christ. For Delitzsch "Jahve implies Jesus" and the coming of Yahweh and

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<sup>68</sup> F. Delitzsch, *Psalms I*, pp. 374, 379.

<sup>69</sup> E. Menn, "No Ordinary Lament." p. 306.

<sup>70</sup> By this we mean how the psalm was used and appropriated in the contexts apart from its possible original ritual context. Examples of this kind may be stated how the psalm was used in *Midrash Tehillim* in Judaism and in the New Testament in Christian age.

<sup>71</sup> F. Delitzsch, *Psalms I*, pp. 377.

Jesus are one and the same. This message is proclaimed by David and he becomes a mediator by his prophetic proclamation. This clearly speaks of Delitzsch's concern for a Jewish-Christian meeting point with the focus of conversion of the Jews. True to his social and religious context, Delitzsch sees the performance of the psalm as God's redemptive action related to David's life and the work of Christ.

Esther Menn looks at the performance of Psalm 22 in the light of the Esther story mentioned in the *Midrash Tehillim* and Jesus' passion story in the New Testament. Menn talks about the dynamics of relationship between the individual and the community expressed through the performance of Psalm 22 once the individual becomes identified as Esther or Jesus.

Menn notes that the *Mid. Teh.* defines Esther as the subject of Psalm 22, both by referring in the superscription to the Jewish queen, and identifying the first person voice of Psalm 22 as Esther's voice as she prays. Menn notes that this identification of Esther as the voice of an individual in Psalm 22 talks about an important figure in religious history, who prays fervently for God's presence in a dark hour of despair. "In a way, the specification of the figure of Esther or Jesus as the subject of the first-person pronouns of Psalm 22 is entirely appropriate, and even sensitive, to the psalm's original function as a lament of the individual."<sup>72</sup> However Menn notes that the identification of Esther as an individual of Psalm 22 is not merely an illustrative application, "Rather, in *Midrash Tehillim* and the New Testament, Psalm 22 becomes identified as the historical prayer of these extraordinary characters, as they face abuse, humiliation, and even death. The details of their idiosyncratic narratives and the distinctive expressions and language of Psalm 22 become so intertwined in these Jewish and Christian sources that it might well appear as if the psalm were originally composed about the unique situations of Esther and Jesus."<sup>73</sup> In this way, Esther and Jesus emerge as the extraordinary individuals who communicate their distress through the psalm at pivotal moments during communal narratives of crisis and salvation.

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<sup>72</sup> E. Menn, "No Ordinary Lament." p. 335.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 335-36.

Menn observes that within Judaism (and Christianity for Jesus' passion) a new ritual setting emerged that emphasized the close association between Psalm 22 and Esther. The annual readings of Psalm 22 on Purim during the Middle Ages gave voice to the anguish of Esther, through whom the Jewish community experienced deliverance. The earliest explicit evidence for the public reading of Psalm 22 on Purim (Adar 14) consists of medieval sources dating from the eleventh century. In the case of the New Testament appropriation of Psalm 22, Menn notes that the psalm became the great passion psalm, proper as a scriptural reading during Holy Week, especially on Good Friday, to express Jesus' agony on the cross. The ritual history of the psalm was an indication that the psalm was used quite early in the Christian church in this way. For instance, Augustine takes Psalm 22 as a subject of his Good Friday sermon in the fourth century. In line with her commitment to Jewish-Christian dialogue Menn draws from Jewish and Christian sources in her application of Psalm 22 as a prayer of exemplary individuals once it is interpreted apart from its 'original' setting. She finds Psalm 22 demonstrates her point about how a prayer of distress and deliverance is experienced and articulated and eventually brings healing in both individual and community contexts like Jewish and Christian.

At the same time Menn emphasizes that the identification of an individual in Psalm 22 with an exemplary individual, whose voice of distress is now heard through the poetry of the psalm can include and be applied to other contexts. She writes:

The identification of the distressed individual in Psalm 22 as Esther or Jesus therefore has the power to inform the identity of countless other distressed individuals, whose lives are drawn into their religious communities' foundational stories of suffering and deliverance.<sup>74</sup>

Thus both Delitzsch and Menn are of the view that Psalm 22 can be read and appropriated in the contexts apart from its own and also strongly suggests that in such reading contexts the effect and meaning of the psalm can become much more dynamic. The "I" of the psalm drastically changes and receives a new meaning when it becomes the voice of another person in another community context.

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<sup>74</sup> E. Menn, "No Ordinary Lament." pp. 340-41.

## 5.4 Conclusion

Delitzsch and Menn interpret Psalm 22 in connection with an interest in Jewish-Christian relations (with a different purpose). Coming from the European and North-American contexts they sought to give a Christian meaning to the psalm. For this reason their interpretations converge at several points. David as the petitioning author of the psalm is important for Delitzsch as he reflects the content of the psalm in and through his life. In spite of the ambiguity of the Davidic superscription of the psalm Menn thinks that it is important for the identity of the psalm and that it becomes a potential point for later association of the psalm with other exemplary individuals. In conjunction with the function of the lament of the individual in a community context, the dynamics between the individual and the community of the psalm is important for these interpreters as it achieves its concreteness in a faithful community. The two interpreters noticed overarching themes of lament and thanksgiving in the psalm in its poetic structure by an upward swing. In this way the psalm is presented in a well knit poetic structure.

Delitzsch and Menn strongly argue for the performance of the psalm when it is used for a dynamic between an individual and community in the history of its interpretation in Christianity and Judaism. This is clearly exemplified by the use of the psalm in the New Testament and in Rabbinic Judaism. The biblical figures of David and Esther in the history of Israel and Jesus Christ in the New Testament are the clear case studies for the scholars to illustrate their point of view. These case studies provide examples of an image of perfect suffering that is comparable with any human suffering in that suffering is experienced, articulated and eventually healed. As noted by Menn, the association of Psalm 22 with the stories of Esther and Jesus and their subsequent use in liturgical traditions of Judaism and Christianity speaks of the powerful potential inherent in the psalm that it is capable of addressing the sufferings of other individual and community experiences.

In the light of what is said above using Delitzsch and Menn as dialogue partners, a Christian Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22 is relevant and appropriate. As noted above Delitzsch's treatment and application of the psalm is carried out under the overall premise of Jewish conversion to Christianity. Delitzsch considers Old



Testament psalms like Psalm 22 like prophetic psalms of David about God's salvation which is conveyed to us by David as it historically unfolds in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This concern is predominant in the case of Dalit Christians as they interpret the psalm in the light of the biblical message of God's salvation. They see the distress and deliverance of David and Christ as their own in this process. Even when Delitzsch interprets the psalm from a different context and purpose certainly he converges with Dalit interpreters at several points.

As noted above Menn had the broader purpose of Jewish-Christian dialogue in dealing with Psalm 22. Through Psalm 22 she demonstrated her concern that a biblical text continues to engage ordinary believers because of its association with exemplary individuals. The association with Esther and Jesus illustrates that the psalm might be originally composed for Esther or Jesus. Dalit Christians take Psalm 22 in the same light as discussed by Menn. Psalm 22 is important for Dalits because of its obvious association with Jesus Christ whose sacrificial death on the cross and his resurrection becomes a profound point for their interpretation. The association of the psalm with Esther is of particular relevance for Dalit women as they articulate their distress and deliverance through the psalm. David-Esther-Jesus Christ is the focus with which Dalits interpret the psalm as Menn has done from a different context. As we shall notice from chapters 6-9, for Dalit Christians Psalm 22 becomes one of the key biblical texts like in the case of the psalm's association with David-Esther-Jesus Christ. As noted by Menn, Dalit interpretation can be included as one among "countless other distressed individuals" whose voices should be heard through the interpretation of Psalm 22.

However it is disappointing to note that both Delitzsch and Menn have not touched any issues of social suffering and oppression themes emerging out of their discussion of the psalm. While this is a drawback in both their approaches Dalits pick up the themes of social suffering and oppression from their context in relation to the psalm. While Dalits share certain common hermeneutical mechanisms with Delitzsch and Menn, they nevertheless stand distinct. We shall return to this discussion in chapter 10 below.

## **Chapter 6**

### **The Caste System and Its Impact on Dalits in India**

#### **6.0 Introduction**

In chapters 2-5 we examined Psalm 22 in the light of a few Early Christian, western and modern Christian interpretations. In chapter 2 we examined the details of the Hebrew text in the light of its form, structure, setting and form and rhetorical critical explanation. It was argued that the structural and poetic elements in the psalm are useful to set them in dialogue with a Dalit interpretation. In chapter 3 we looked at the New Testament appropriation of Psalm 22 by its writers with a particular rhetorical and theological purpose. The psalm, as we argued in chapter 3, points towards a wider application just as it was applied in the context of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In chapter 4 with the help of selected Early Christian interpreters we identified certain issues concerning Psalm 22 in order that those issues may serve the purpose of our dialogue with Dalit Christian interpretation. In chapter 5 we selected two modern scholars from the European and North American context in order to examine their contribution of Psalm 22 and identified some issues for a conversation with Dalit interpretation. In the concluding sections of chapters 2-5 it was clearly pointed out that each of the traditional biblical interpretations and two Early Christian interpretations are taken as conversation partners with a Christian Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22. As a result of this conversation it is hoped that there will be a mutual dialogue and enrichment.

In the light of the above discussion, in chapters 7-9 we will undertake a Christian Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22. In chapter 10 we argue and demonstrate how a genuine dialogue and conversation takes place between western and Early Christian and Dalit Christian interpretation of the psalm. Before proceeding to a Dalit Christian interpretation certain general terms and concepts related to the Indian, Hindu and Dalit context must be clarified. The task of the present chapter is to set the stage for the detailed discussion that follows below concerning Dalit interpretations of Psalm 22.

The ordeal of the Dalits is linked with their history which goes back three thousand years to the Aryan invasion of ancient India. The Dalits have been discriminated against through the hierarchically stratified caste system and they are ritually ostracised as impure and polluted. Stratification of society is a universal phenomenon, but caste as a system is peculiar to India. Caste is based on birth and ascribed status. The caste system ensures prestige, power and privileges for a small aristocracy and inherited deprivation and subjection for a large number of people who are forced to work and produce wealth to keep the upper few in comfort. Dalits are disregarded and discarded as worthless by the so called upper castes from the existing form of organization of Indian society with its hierarchical gradations of pollution and purity. Since the caste system is based on graded inequality, those who suffered from deprivation and destitution could not unite and protest against the system. The caste system is an extreme form of social stratification in India.<sup>1</sup> However, it coexists with occupational stratification, linguistic stratification, sexual stratification and religious stratification to name but a few. We must be careful to note that each of these forms of stratification has their own axial principles and thus they are analytically separate and separable.<sup>2</sup>

With this backdrop the present chapter introduces certain concepts and practices related to the caste system and its impact on Dalits. Social stratification, endogamy, purity-pollution difference related to occupational differentiation, the role and impact of sanskritization and the issue of Hindu Dalit conversions to other religious traditions are some of the crucial issues at hand for our consideration in this chapter.

## **6.1 Social Stratification**

The rigidity of the caste system in India can be seen in its social stratification defined in the form of caste stratification. Accordingly Indian society is divided into three categories:

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Dipankar Gupta, "Hierarchy and Difference: An Introduction," in Dipankar Gupta (ed) *Social Stratification* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 4. Second impression.

First, we have the *caste community*, which consists of four castes that are hierarchically ordered. This hierarchy is based on the common and most general category of caste called *Varna* (caste or colour). The Brahmins are the so called priests who are placed on the top of this order. These people are said to be the preservers and protectors of the eternal laws of the universe. Next Kshatriyas are the so called rulers or warriors are the defenders and guarantors of the security of the community. Vaisyas are the third group, the so called business community who are the keepers and distributors of the wealth. The last group at the bottom of the order are Sudras, the so called labourers who are supposed to be involved in service to the rest of the communities by undertaking menial jobs and are usually considered as the polluted community. Another myth argued that the first three groups are supposed to be the ritually pure and are socio-economically dominant since they are believed to be twice-born and the fourth group is ritually impure and socio-economically dominated since they are believed to be once-born.

Second, related to, but outside of, these four segments of the Indian human society there exists a fifth *outcaste community*. Even though this populace consists of about sixteen percent of the Indian community, it was not included into its composition. Since the Hindu society considers this fifth community as outside their gates, they are called “Untouchables”, “Depressed Class” along with the term Dalit. The legislation of the government in India categorizes them as Scheduled Caste (SC).<sup>3</sup> The term “Dalit” rightly fits into the present condition of the low caste community. It comes from the Sanskrit root *dal* meaning oppressed, broken, and crushed, which most tangibly describes the lives of most of the members of this community. Moreover this term has become an expression of self-representation preferred by the Dalit activists to regain their past identity and to project them as collective.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The four major groups mentioned among the Hindu society and also among the Dalits in particular they are further divided into several sub-castes which are called *jaatis*. These are very much in operation as the functional identities on the ground. For a detailed description on this division see Simon R. Charsley, “Caste, Cultural Resources and Social Mobility,” in Simon R. Charsley and G. K. Karanth (eds.), *Dalits Initiatives and Experience from Karnataka* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), pp. 44-71.

<sup>4</sup> Gopal Guru, “The Politics of Naming,” *Seminar* 491 (1998), pp. 14-18.

Third, many distinct and diverse communities are grouped under the term *Adivasis*. The legislation of the government in India categorizes them as Tribals or Scheduled Tribes (ST).<sup>5</sup> The term *Adivasis* (the ancient or original dwellers of the land) is used to refer to this group to retain their claim of being original people of the land and to point to their cultural and religious relatedness to things of the earth/land. The *Adivasis* “generally have lived through exploitative, oppressive and suppressive social and political structures in India.”<sup>6</sup> Moreover they have been “alienated from their land both by ‘greedy’ caste communities and by overzealous governments, which takes away tribal lands for mining and big industries.”<sup>7</sup>

Our focus in this chapter relates to the first two groups in the overall discussion of the caste system. Thus we will explain some more of the concerns of those first two groups in this section. The word “caste” is taken from the Portuguese word *casta*. It can be defined as “a rigid social system in which a social hierarchy is maintained generation after generation and allows little mobility out of the position to which a person is born.”<sup>8</sup>

In order to understand the caste system one must look at the dharma tradition in Hinduism which is used to refer both to the orderliness of human society and to each person’s duty to uphold that order through every action. The earliest Vedic text, the *Rig-Veda*, gives a myth, which affirms this dharma tradition and concerns the sacrifice of a giant *Purusha*. In this it is made clear that the *Shudras* or serfs have a duty to serve and support the three higher groups. Two quotations from the *Rig Veda* and *Manu Dharma Sastra* are sufficient to confirm this fact:

“When they divided the *Purusa* into many parts, how did they arrange him? What was his mouth? What were his two arms? What were his thighs and feet called?”

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<sup>5</sup> India has 427 ‘scheduled’ tribes, each unique in its own right. For some information on this issue see Buddhadeb Chaudhuri, “Preface,” in B. Chaudhuri (ed), *Tribal Transformations in India* (New Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1992), vol. 2, p. xiii.

<sup>6</sup> Nirmal Minz, *Rise Up, my people, and Claim the Promise: The Gospel among the Tribes in India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1997), pp. 11-12.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> “Caste (Social)” in Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopaedia, 2005. To view this see <http://encarta.msn.com>

"The *brahmin* was his mouth, his two arms were made the *rajanya* (warrior), his two thighs the *vaisya*, (trader and agriculturist), from his feet the *sudra* (servile class was born)".<sup>9</sup>

"But a *sudra*, whether bought or unbought, may be compelled to do servile work; for he was created by the self-existent (svayambhu) to be the slave of a brahmin."

"A *sudra*, though emancipated by his master, is not released from servitude; since that is innate in him, who can set free from it?"<sup>10</sup>

According to Kinsley, there are a few central assumptions for the caste system. First, it is assumed that rank and hierarchy are intrinsic to human relations. Second, rank is ascribed by birth and not by merit. Also, the rank of each individual in the present society is based on one's own past actions and on the fact that that ones' future social role is being determined in this life according to one's present actions. Moreover, the aim of social life is to learn and fulfil a given, ascribed social role that is necessary to the orderly functioning of society.<sup>11</sup> These assumptions have assisted in the maintenance of this hierarchy.

Unfortunately in most popular renditions of the caste system, the above mentioned hierarchy alone is emphasised and that too from the Brahmin point of view. While the *Purusasukta* legend is normally taken to explain the four-tier hierarchy of caste, the presence of several *jati puranas*, justify different hierarchies and the Brahmin is not always at the top. One example from Padma Purana illustrates our point. In the Padma Purana, the original brahmana, Lord Brahma says:

(Even) If a man is born in the family of a good learned brāhmaṇa, he is not to be worshipped if he is inactive (i.e. does not perform sacred rites); (but if he performs good acts and even if) he is (born) in a family with a low-caste wife (i.e. even if his mother is of a low caste) he is adorable like Vyāsa, and Vibhāṇḍaka. Viśvāmitra born in the family of kṣatriyas is equal to me; so also Vasiṣṭha, the son of a prostitute, and brāhmaṇas who are prophets.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the Brahmin model is only one model of caste hierarchy among many other non-brahmin models. Risely points out the exalted origins in the caste legends of Doms, Chamars, Chasa, Dhoba, Kahars and the Brahminical texts vehemently deny

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<sup>9</sup> Rig Veda, X, 90:11-12 cited in Arvind P. Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," in James Massey (ed) *Indigenous People: Dalits- Dalit Issues in today's theological debate* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994), p. 214.

<sup>10</sup> Manu Dharma Sastra, VIII, 413-14 quoted in Arvind P. Nirmal "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology." p. 214.

<sup>11</sup> David R. Kinsley, *Hinduism: A Cultural Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Inc., 1993), p. 88.

<sup>12</sup> Padma Purana, Srsthi-kanda 46. 126b-128a taken from N. A. Deshpande (translated and annotated), *The Padma-Purāṇa Part II* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1989), p. 647.



this claim.<sup>13</sup> This indicates that different versions of the social hierarchy of caste do exist and there seems to be a tension in the interpretation of these versions. Gerald Berreman writes of an incident that depicts this tension over hierarchy accurately. During his field work he once related to some of his low caste respondents the orthodox hierarchy according to which the Brahmin was unequivocally on top. After listening carefully to Berreman these low caste respondents laughed, one of them said, 'You have been talking with Brahmins.'<sup>14</sup>

The above discussion on social stratification related to caste and hierarchy indicates that the low status given to Dalits is imposed on them by the high caste community.

## **6.2 Endogamy and Purity-Pollution**

The rigidity of the caste structure described above and its associated ramifications of socio-economic inequality are based on the endogamy which ensures privileges to higher castes on a permanent basis. The privileges that are enjoyed by higher castes are preserved to their progeny through inheritance, while handicaps are sustained by the lower castes on a permanent basis. B. R. Ambedkar, one of the great pioneers of Dalit emancipation in India identified endogamy as the fundamental feature of caste which he described as 'the soul of caste'. The prohibition of interdining with a person from another caste or a non-Hindu, or adopting an occupation other than the occupation of one's caste, were two other important features of caste that he called 'the body of caste'<sup>15</sup>

Endogamy is practised to prevent inter-caste relations and inter-caste marriages. Marriages are traditionally arranged within one's own caste. The background of each bride and groom are thoroughly studied to make sure they fit. Caste is the key qualification sought, and how it affects basic socialization of society, is a filter system when seeking potential life partners. Marriage within caste is such a strong

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<sup>13</sup> H. H. Risely, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal* 2 vols. (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat, 1891).

<sup>14</sup> Gerald D. Berreman, "The Brahmanical View of Caste," in Dipankar Gupta (ed) *Social Stratification*, pp. 84-92.

<sup>15</sup> Valerian Rodrigues (ed), *The Essential Writings of B. R. Ambedkar* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 101.

factor that there are directories that publish a list of eligible Indians and what caste groups they belong to.<sup>16</sup>

In order to maintain the rigid caste structure the rules of purity-pollution are imposed on Dalits and endogamy is one such harsh imposition. The village *panchayats* (councils) often mete out harsh punishments, including excommunications and death sentences, to villagers who transgress social norms, especially those who defy caste boundaries and caste endogamy and engage in inter-caste sexual relationships. Most often Dalits are the victims of these harsh punishments. Several incidents are reported in newspapers everyday in this regard.<sup>17</sup> In these village councils Dalits are hardly represented. Instead, these councils are mainly governed by the members of dominant caste community.

At the same time the dominant caste men are known for sexually abusing Dalit women in the name of caste conflicts. The dominant caste men not only treat Dalit women as morally degenerate but consider them as mere objects of their lust. In some cases the dominant caste men use Dalit women for sexual intercourse under the pretext of a sure cure for some diseases like syphilis.<sup>18</sup> In several cases Dalit women are abandoned by the dominant caste men after marrying them, in some cases with children.<sup>19</sup> In such cases the women are left with additional burden of child rearing and the stigma. The rules of strict endogamy are not followed by the dominant caste men when they sexually abuse Dalit women.

On the basis of *Purushasukta* in Rig Veda it has been argued that different castes have different designated codes of proper conduct (*dharma*), according to their ranks

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<sup>16</sup> For some discussion on this issue see Susan Bayly, "Caste, Society and Politics in India From the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age," in Gordon Johnson, C. A. Bayly and J. F. Richards (eds.) *The New Cambridge History of India* Vol. IV. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 314-16.

<sup>17</sup> A couple (dalit boy and dominant caste girl) was thrown out of a village in Haryana with their 18 month old child for the reason that they had defiled the community norms of marriage. (*Frontline*, 10<sup>th</sup> November, 2000). A young Dalit boy was burnt alive in a village square in Uttar Pradesh, for courting a girl from a dominant caste community. (*Times of India*, 29<sup>th</sup> July, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> Bhagwan Das, "Socio-Economic Problems of Dalits," in Bhagwan Das and James Massey (eds.) *Dalit Solidarity* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1995) p. 74.

<sup>19</sup> An example of Sudha Surendran, a Dalit girl aged 22 years was abandoned by her dominant caste man after having two children. (Source: *ONE* xxxi: 1, 2005).

on the hierarchy that they are obliged to perform to contribute to their society. For example, a Brahmin's proper behaviour will be to be non violent, religious and have a vegetarian diet; Kshatriyas are expected to be aggressive warriors who fight and defend and consume meat and alcohol.<sup>20</sup> In the caste system individuals who are born in one group can never become a member of any other group. Their social status and identity is given by birth and cannot alter their given identity. Moreover, members of each caste are assigned certain specific tasks to be carried out, certain societal norms and customs to be strictly observed especially in matters of choice of occupation and marriage.<sup>21</sup>

Inequalities amongst castes are seen as a part of the ordained natural order and it is explained or justified in terms of purity and pollution. High-caste status is associated with purity and low-caste status, with pollution. Those born into high-ranking class would have inborn purity, like the Brahmins and similarly, the low caste Dalits are born into pollution. The Dalits can easily pollute a Brahmin just by physical contact and the latter will have to perform ritual cleanliness like bathing in flowing water and changing clothes.

Low-castes that perform menial jobs that deal with burying corpses, killing or skinning animals, cleaning toilets and clearing rubbish and body excretion, are considered tainted and polluting. For centuries, the association of the Dalits with such defiling occupations has been subtly guarded and perpetuated in the name of *dharma* and karma by all those who are in the upper strata of the caste society.<sup>22</sup> The Dalits are kept away from any sacred learning and ritual and away from the mainstream society. The Untouchables have to live outside the villages and have their own wells so as not to pollute the rest of the people.

Since occupational specialization is believed to be in accord with the ordained order of the universe, and since purity or pollution is traditionally hereditary, low castes

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<sup>20</sup> Karan Singh, *Religions of India* (New Delhi: Clarion Books, 1983), p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> A. Ramaiah, "The Dalit Issue: A Hindu Perspective," in James Massey (ed) *Indigenous People*, pp. 76-95.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 92.

that hold demeaning jobs have their lives remain polluted forever. For example, a sweeper will be a sweeper for his entire life and his children will have to inherit the same job and be polluted as well. Similarly, the upper-class groups like the Brahmins will always retain their inherent purity from their parents, as long as they carry out the daily cleanliness rituals and do not violate any purity codes.<sup>23</sup>

The foregoing analysis on endogamy and purity-pollution concepts indicates that they are introduced and enforced by the high caste community on outcaste communities in order to keep the caste structure intact and alive.

### 6.3 Sanskritization

This term invented by M. N. Srinivas describes the process of “assimilating” indigenous religions, tribes and sects into mainstream Hinduism along with its rituals and practices leading, over a period of time, to the gradual disappearance of native culture and practices. According to Srinivas the term is defined as follows:

“Sanskritization is a process by which a ‘low’ Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high caste.”<sup>24</sup> Although majority of Dalits today do not take part in Sanskritization, it still continues to haunt the minds of some low caste Hindus who try to raise their status by adopting upper caste customs, such as wearing sacred cord, and becoming vegetarians. The Dalit patriarchy as visible today is based on this general influence of Sanskritisation. The Dalit men subjugate their women as high caste men have done for ages. Dalits have taken over the idea that the husband is like a god and his wife should treat him with due respect. Many women fast for the sake of their husbands. For example, Mahar women “celebrate *vata savitri*”<sup>25</sup> in May/June, walking

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<sup>23</sup> C. Bouglé, “The Essence and Reality of the Caste System,” in Dipankar Gupta (ed) *Social Stratification*, pp. 64-73.

<sup>24</sup> M. N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> This is a Hindu festival celebrated in all parts of India by devout women. The women fast for seven days with the view that their wish may be fulfilled. They think of *Savitri-Satyavan* story during these days. They believe that *Savitri* as a woman of chastity, boldness and perseverance redeemed her husband *Satyavan* from the clutches of God *Yama*.

seven times round the banyan tree, worshipping the tree and praying for the 'grace to be married seven times to the same husband'."<sup>26</sup>

M. N. Srinivas argues that "the sources of mobility (among castes) lay in the political and economic systems, Sanskritization provided a traditional idiom for the expression of such mobility."<sup>27</sup> However, Srinivas cautions us that not all the cases of Sanskritization had a mobility aspect.<sup>28</sup> Moreover Srinivas "acknowledged that this process is not to be viewed as a singular and monolithic whole but that empirically many models of Sanskritization could be identified, noting that regional variation is crucial, determining factor."<sup>29</sup>

Contrary to what Srinivas explained certain Dalit communities may find their social mobility and make certain adjustments to suit their surrounding caste communities for the sake of peaceful coexistence and maintaining self respect. Vincentnathan argues for the centrality of getting respect from others and having self-respect as being major concerns among rural untouchables studied in Tamilnadu. What seems to be common in the way untouchables see hierarchy, equality and social value, is the inherent potential to improvement in all people and an utterly egalitarian concept of person.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Traude Pillai-Vetschera, "Ambedkar's Daughters: A Study of Mahar Women in Ahmednagar District of Maharashtra," in *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values* (New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1999), p. 233.

<sup>27</sup> M. N. Srinivas, "Mobility in the Caste System," in Dipankar Gupta (ed) *Social Stratification*, p. 315.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Vineeta Sinha, "Problematizing Received Categories: Revisiting 'Folk Hinduism' and 'Sanskritization,'" *Current Sociology* 54: 1 (2006), p. 102. In some cases like for example mālas in Andhra Pradesh the low caste Hindus do not simply assimilate Hindu religious practices instead they simply follow certain customs on their own terms for the sake of cordial coexistence. For more details on this point see Minna Saavala, "About Religion for Gaining Middle-Class Status," Draft paper presented in the panel: "Low Caste 'Untouchable' and Anti-caste Movements," the 16<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, Edinburgh, September 5 – 9, 2000.

<sup>30</sup> Lynn Vincentnathan, "Untouchable Concepts of Person and Society," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 27:1 (1993), pp. 53-82.

Sanskritization has some influence on the low caste people in their struggle to survive among their caste Hindus. At the same time the adoption of Hindu culture and religious practices are not always the instruments of Sanskritization.

#### 6.4 Religious Conversions

Some Dalits resorted to conversion as a means not only to protest against the caste system but also to end their stigmatized identity. While a good number of the Dalits embraced Christianity, some embraced Islam, some Buddhism and some others Sikhism. Through conversion the Dalits have been successful in registering their protest against Hinduism which declared them untouchables. But they have not been successful in ending all their problems arising out of their caste background. Certain anti-caste movements like Buddhism, and the *bhakti* sects of medieval Hinduism, although not very successful in rooting out the evils of the caste system, certainly made tremendous impact on the Dalit converts from Hinduism to gain some assured identity in the midst of their social stigma of untouchability. Yet some would argue that these anti-caste movements are more for escape from the caste rather than for the protest against the caste.<sup>31</sup>

Dalits suffer from caste distinctions even after embracing other religious faiths. No one can deny the fact that Christianity came as a panacea to the Dalits at a time when they were denied their self-respect and worth in Hinduism. For a community that was denied access to traditional scriptures, and a community that experienced discrimination that was sanctified and justified by the same Scriptures, the news of a loving God embodied in Jesus Christ offered Dalits something unique and foundational which neither governments, socio-economic change, ideology, nor an alternative religious faith could provide—dignity, equality and a sense of worth. At the same time Dalit Christians are discriminated and marginalised in the Church because of their low caste origin.

Although many Dalits are happy to embrace Islam, the Hindu Muslim riots created fear among Dalits who intended to embrace Islam. The fear among Dalits is that if

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<sup>31</sup> Duncan B. Forrester, *Caste and Christianity: Attitudes and Policies on Caste of Anglo-Saxon Protestant Missions in India* (London: Curzon Press, 1980), p. 11.



they embrace Islam the upper caste people may turn against them and the present welfare schemes announced for their benefit may drastically affect them. The high caste Hindus keep silent and allowed governments to continue the welfare schemes implemented for Dalits.<sup>32</sup>

Even after embracing Buddhism, Dalits continue to live in caste disabilities. In rural areas several Dalit Buddhist converts from Hinduism are treated as outcasts. Similarly the Dalit converts to Sikhism suffer from caste discrimination as most members of the Sikh religion are from a non-Dalit background.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless Dalits have found solace in embracing other religions. Several Dalits' conversion to Neo-Buddhism for instance, in recent years generated a strong hope as it advocates the equality of all human beings. Following the footsteps of B.R. Ambedkar, Dalits have received inspiration and accepted this conversion movement with the view that it helps them to live as human beings with self respect and dignity. Moreover certain local religious and secular movements also helped them to regain their lost identity to some extent.<sup>34</sup>

## 6.5 Conclusion

As noted above the caste system's rigidity has been maintained and established over many centuries. The strict laws of purity-pollution and endogamy are firmly established to keep this rigid structure of caste intact. The graded system of caste also helps the dominant caste communities to ascribe certain defiling unclean occupations to the Dalit communities. The influence of Sanskritization is seen in the lives of Dalits to some extent and it is not noticed in some other cases where the observance of certain customs of 'high culture' by Dalits is a matter of their coexistence among Hindu community. Over the years the nature and character of Dalits have changed

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<sup>32</sup> A. Ramaiah, "The Dalit Issue: A Hindu Perspective," p. 90.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Two popular religious movements in Andhra Pradesh in the early part of 19<sup>th</sup> century that gave Dalits hope and identity are: Pothuluri Veerabrahmam and Yogi Nasariah. Both of them rejected caste system of Hinduism and preached for the equality of all human beings. For details on these movements see Stephen Fuchs, *Rebellious Prophets: A Study of Messianic Movements in Indian Religions* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965).

significantly as a result of their conversion from Hinduism to other religious faiths. These conversions, although not bringing a total change in the Dalit situation of the caste eradication, nevertheless serve as a means if not to end the notion of untouchability. In this process the Dalits may have found strength to express their unhappiness over their given status.

## **Chapter 7**

### **The Role of Hindu Scriptures and Karma in Relation to Indian Christian Dalit Interpretation of Psalm 22**

#### **7.0 Introduction**

In the previous chapter we made a general presentation concerning the impact of the caste system and the social stratification on the religious and social life of Dalits in the Indian context. In the same light the interpretive context of the Bible in the Indian context is firmly tied up with the issues of caste and other practices discussed in chapter 6. There is a popular belief that the Aryans brought with them their sacred writings called the Vedas. They were originally fire worshippers and believed in cremation instead of burying their dead. They also invented the theory of soul-transmigration in which at death you do not go to heaven or to hell but you are reborn into another body on earth. This next body could be animal, vegetable or human depending on whether you were good or bad. Your past behaviour catches up with you in your present life due to the law of karma. You could in your next reincarnation end up a clam, a carrot, a bush or a human being. The highest rebirth you could wish for was to be born as one of the white-skinned Brahmins who by virtue of their colour were considered the “higher” class. The inherent racism of historic Hinduism is thus blatant. You were judged by the colour of your skin, not the content of your character, skills or talents. The darker your skin, the lower your caste and rank in Hindu society. The whiter your skin, the higher your caste and rank. The Brahmins prided themselves on their white skin while despising the darker skinned untouchables who were often viewed and treated as sub-humans.

The principles of the caste system and the rule of conduct for different castes were codified in the ‘shastras’ or the institutional treaties of the Hindus which date back to the third century B.C. These rules are imposed on all the Dalits in India including Christian Dalits. Christian Dalits have been subjected to the pervasive influence of the Hindu doctrine of karma and they think that because of their karma in the previous life they are suffering in the present life. In the past centuries the Indian interpretation of the Bible was either consciously or unconsciously dominated by the

interests of dominant caste communities.<sup>1</sup> Biblical interpretation in India sought to translate, adapt, and correlate the 'good news' of Christian proclamation taking into consideration its Hindu philosophical and cultural frame work. "Doing contextual Indian-Christian theology (subsequently Indian interpretation of the Bible) was, thus, overwhelmingly (if not universally) conceived as baptizing the gospel of Christ into the holy waters of Hindu philosophy and culture."<sup>2</sup>

Since the Indian Christian community is dominated by Dalits, their voice in the interpretation of Bible must be taken seriously. This fits into the role of Indian Christian theology and biblical interpretation takes on the task of advocacy for the marginalised so that they will be seen and heard within the reflective and dialogical process of theologizing. In this process the collective voices and expressions of the marginalised community will be seen as transfiguring voices of the entire interpretation of the Bible in the Indian context.

With the above view as backdrop, the present chapter examines the role of Hindu Scriptures and karma theory in relation to Dalits, Indian interpretation of the Bible (with a brief introduction on the role of missionaries in the interpretation of the Bible) with the help of Vengal Chakkarai as a representative interpreter on Psalm 22 and its related concerns. A Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22 and its relationship to karma theory is discussed in a separate section. In the last section we intend to gather and reflect on the significant features of a Dalit interpretation of the Bible in relation to Psalm 22. How Christian Dalits contextualized and interpreted Psalm 22 (using a reader centred method) in the midst of their Hindu scriptural context, karma doctrine, caste and related social and religious environment to maintain their distinct interpretation of the Bible is the main issue we intend to argue and demonstrate.

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<sup>1</sup> For examples of dominant caste Christians' appropriation of the Bible see R. H. S. Boyd, "The Use of the Bible in Indian Christian Theology," *IJT* 22: 4 (1974), pp. 141-62; Koshy Abraham, *Prajapathi: The Cosmic Christ* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1997).

## 7.1 The Role of Hindu Scriptures and Karma Theory in Relation to Dalits

Hindu Scriptures are always viewed as detrimental to Dalit liberation and emancipation in their remarks on karma and its related concerns. Before dealing with this aspect in detail, let us make a few quick observations on how the concept of disparity is viewed within God's creation in non-Hindu religious traditions. Two examples can be seen in this regard:

First, in one of the popular old Christian hymns, "All things bright and beautiful," written by Cecil Frances Alexander (1823 – 1895) composed in the melody of the Royal Oak, first published in 1848 in the collection "Hymns for little Children," the words are composed as follows:

The rich man in his castle,  
The poor man at his gate,  
He made them high or lowly,  
And ordered their estate.<sup>3</sup>

Although this stanza is omitted from most hymnals in the subsequent years, the negative impact of these verses can't be exaggerated. It is made clear that God is responsible for creating disparity in the human world.

Second, in Islam we do not actually find the caste system as we see in Hinduism. But there are similar kinds of disparity among different sects based on their birth. The following words confirm this:

The Myth that the Muslims are a monolithic society is slowly falling apart. Although Islam does not give credence to the caste system, there is widespread discrimination on the basis of birth among the Muslims<sup>4</sup>

In Islam we find two major sects and as many smaller sects as in Hinduism. The complexity and the problems of intra sect conflict are very clear from the following words:

Schisms, focusing first on disagreements over who should lead the new faith, and later, on matters of doctrine, began developing immediately after Muhammad's death in the year 632: Islam splintered into the Sunni and Shia sects, which always were at each other's throats;

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<sup>2</sup> Sathianathan Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, p. 18. Words in the brackets are mine.

<sup>3</sup> Words are taken from <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/a/l/allthing.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Quotation is taken from [www.swordoftruth.com/swordoftruth/archives/oldarchives/cwam.html](http://www.swordoftruth.com/swordoftruth/archives/oldarchives/cwam.html)

Kharijis, who provided the first major schism within Islam; Alawis, who broke away from the Shiites in the 9th century; Ahmadiyyahs, who believe their founder was a renovator of Islam, a position other Muslims consider to be heretical; the Wahhabis, who flay the rest of the Sunnis; the Ismailis, earlier known as the Hashishi or the Malahida ("impious heretics"); Druzes, whom most Muslims consider blasphemous since they declared that God was manifested in human form as the Egyptian caliph al Hakim Bi-amr Allah 1,000 years ago, and who do not accept new members and often pose as members of the dominant religion where they live; Salafis, Nusayris, Fatimids, Musta'lians, Qarmatians... and so on and so forth -- none of whom will be ready to give their daughters to men of the other sects.<sup>5</sup>

From the above examples it is made clear that caste and class differences among human beings is a given reality and are also believed to be divinely sanctioned.

7.1.1 Statements related to Karma theory in Hindu Scriptures: The word *karma* is the same as *karman*. The word is neuter and is derived from the root *kr* which means "to do, make, perform, accomplish, cause, effect, prepare, undertake." So the word *karman* means "act, action, performance, business". In compounds it becomes *karma*. In the religious and philosophical sense, *karma* means an 'action potential' which manifests itself as the moral result or consequence in the lives hereafter.<sup>6</sup> It is stated that *Karma* is one of the important tenets of Hinduism that includes actions, causality and destiny. Action being inevitable, it is said, the human individual is bound by the results of his actions, pleasant fruits from good deeds and unpleasant consequences from evil ones. What we are today is the result of our past deeds and at the same time we are the makers of our future by the way we act at present.

The Brahmanic Hindu world-view of karma is based on the ethical principles of: karma, dharma and moksha; the concept of rebirth; the notion of purity and pollution. This world-view justifies the hierarchical caste system and untouchability.<sup>7</sup> Much more devastating than the physical oppression has been the psychological oppression inflicted by the Hindu doctrines of karma and rebirth, which have taught the Dalits that they are a degraded, worthless people suffering just retribution for sins

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Yuvraj Krishan, *The Doctrine of Karma: Its Origins and Development in Brāhmanical, Buddhist and Jaina Traditions* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997), p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> S. M. Michael, "Theological and Sociological Implications of Karma and Rebirth in India," *VerbumSVD* 1 (1990), pp. 27-42.



committed in earlier lives. Let us look at the appropriate Hindu texts that propagate the idea of individual karma and its impact on the society as a whole.

In the Brāhmanas the main focus was on the ritual acts, not on the human actions. DeSmet argues that “the human self born from the womb is simply mortal. But the hyper-self (adhyātman) which results from sacrifice is immortal. Man can fabricate it by the sacrificial process of adjusting exactly a system of ritual acts (*karma*).”<sup>8</sup> In the *Śatapatha Brāhmana* it is mentioned: “As a snake gets rid of his dead skin, he too gets rid of this mortal body which is evil. By getting fashioned out of ric, yajns, sāman and oblation, he comes to possess the celestial world.”<sup>9</sup> Further it is stressed that, “Truly he who knows this passes from the perishable to the imperishable, he conquers repeated death, and attains the full measure of life.”<sup>10</sup>

In the Upanishads and subsequent literature, karma acquires an entirely new significance. The emphasis falls on the nature of good and evil act, *punya* and *pāpa*, *dharma* and *adharma*, right and wrong. The Upanishads emphasise the point: “It is not a rite but a deed. It is done through body (*kāyika*), speech (*vācika*) and mind (*mānasika*). Its most important ingredient is intention.”<sup>11</sup>

In *Brhadāranyaka Upanishad* 4, the notion of karma appears in relation to man’s after life but the sacrificial requirement and the restriction of the sacrifice have vanished. The new requirement is death, the very passing from life to afterlife. What is fashioned now is not an imperishable self but a new body; it is not fashioned through a combination of rites but from the inner possessions of the self.

As a goldsmith, making use of material of a (golden) object, foregoes another new and more beautiful form, so does this ātman, striking the body aside and dispelling ignorance, make another new and beautiful form ... This ātman is Brahman indeed: it consists of discerning consciousness, mind, breath, sight and hearing, of earth, water, wind and space, light and

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<sup>8</sup> Richard DeSmet, “Fleeting Time and Sacrificially Produced Continuity in Vedic Brahmanism and in Early Christianity,” *Indian Theological Studies* 19: 2 (1982), p. 131.

<sup>9</sup> *Śatapatha Brāhmana*, 11.2.6.13-14. Translated from Sanskrit into English and quoted in Richard DeSmet, “Job’s ‘Insufferable Comforters’ and the Law of Karma,” *VJTR* 58: 5 (1994), pp. 308-09.

<sup>10</sup> *Śatapatha Brāhmana*, 12.3.4.11 quoted in Richard DeSmet, “Job’s,” p. 309.

<sup>11</sup> Yuvraj Krishan, *The Doctrine of Karma*, p. 560.

darkness, desire and desirelessness, anger and the lack of it, merit and demerit, it consists of all things.<sup>12</sup>

After this, it is described that Yājñavalkya (the key figure in the Brhadāranyaka Upanishad) takes up the role of karma, no longer as merely ritual actions but as the total behaviour of each individual. He will note the link between karma and desire and, in consequence of this, distinguish between the man of desire and the man free from any desire. The words from Brhadāranyaka Upanishad confirm this:

As a man acts (kārin), as he behaves (cārin), so does he become. Whoso does good, becomes good; whoso does evil becomes evil. By good works a man becomes virtuous, by evil works he becomes evil.<sup>13</sup>

The above statements indicate that the concept of karma occupies a very important place in the major Hindu Scriptures.

7.1.2 The impact of Karma theory on Dalits: Karma has been imposed on Dalits to legitimize the caste hierarchy. What the law of karma originally meant was: You reap what you sow. In fact the chain of cause and effect has little to do with the chain of incarnations, which is wholly imaginary and a later invention. But the perverted theory of karma even its psychological influence, seems to obscure conveniently the principle of social justice here and now.<sup>14</sup>

Karma requires the strict fulfilment of caste obligation. The absence of ethical universalism leads to striving for individual salvation based on attempts to escape the cycle of rebirths. A pious low-caste individual believes that he, too, can win the world; that he can become a *Kshatriya* (member of the royal or warrior Hindu caste) or a Brahmin (high caste of priests) after rebirths in the same pattern. According to the doctrine, the order and rank of the castes are also eternal, as are the courses of the cosmic bodies or the difference between the animal and human species. To overthrow them would be sacrilegious. Rebirth can drag man down to the life of a “worm in the intestine of a dog,” but, according to his conduct, it might raise him and place him in the womb of a queen or a Brahmin’s daughter. Absolute prerequisites,

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<sup>12</sup> Brhadāranyaka Upanishad 4 quoted in Richard DeSmet, “Job’s,” p. 309.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> This is why many underprivileged and down trodden communities are expected to endure their suffering in this world as it is their karma to be so in this life.

however, are strict adherence to caste obligations in the given life. Since the lower castes, furthermore, had the most to win through strict ritual observances of the dictates of the upper caste, they were least tempted to dare any innovation or revolt. It is very clear that so long as the karma doctrine remains unshaken, revolutionary ideas are inconceivable.<sup>15</sup> The words from the Chāndogya Upanishad confirm this:

Those who are of pleasant conduct here the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a pleasant womb, either a womb of a Brahmin, or the womb of a *Kshatriya*, or the womb of a *Vaishya* (the caste of ordinaries). But those who are of stinking conduct here the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a stinking womb, either the womb of a dog, or the womb of a swine or the womb of an outcast (*Chandala*).<sup>16</sup>

“The doctrine of *Karma*,” says John Gunther, “has considerable political consequences. Obviously, it embodies an extreme form of fatalism, which impedes ambition.”<sup>17</sup> Karma theory is indeed, at the root of keeping the down-trodden under perpetual bondage. The theory overlooks the fact that poverty actually is the fault of society—a society in which the greedy and the cunning exploit and rise to the top. The poor man has to accept starvation and squalor because he is underfed and has no energy to break away and create a revolution. He has to accept what life gives him, and so he says, “It is my karma to be like this.” The rich man also resolves: “It is my karma I must have done good deeds in a previous life and now I am reaping the reward of my past actions.” Thus, karma is to accept things as they are. It does not allow revolt against tyranny; it prevents one from shaping one’s own destiny. Being fatalists, the poor in India believe that their sufferings are a punishment for the sins committed in the previous life. Submission without any demur is the only good.<sup>18</sup>

On the basis of our foregoing discussion it is clear that the impact of karma theory on Dalits is pervasive and it continues to play a significant role among the Christian Dalits in their interpretation of the Bible.

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<sup>15</sup> V. A. Mohamad Ashrof, “Reincarnation or Life in the Hereafter,” in <http://www.islamonline.net/english/Contemporary/2004/07/Article01.shtml>

<sup>16</sup> Chāndogya Upanishad 5.10.7 translated and quoted in Robert Ernest Hume (edited and trans.), *The Thirteen Principle Upanishads* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 233.

<sup>17</sup> John Gunther, *Inside Asia* (London: Hamilton, 1939), p. 433.

<sup>18</sup> V. A. Mohamad Ashrof, “Reincarnation.”

## 7.2 Indian Interpretation of the Bible

Methodologically, the Indian Christian interpretation of the Bible during the nineteenth century was done in the light of Sanskritic exegesis, “to construct inner, mystical, and allegorical meaning and transcendent knowledge”<sup>19</sup> and it differs from traditional western biblical exegesis. The latter is more focused on the historicity of the text, the intention of the author, and so on.<sup>20</sup>

At least two aspects must be stressed when discussing the Bible in relation to its interpretation in an Indian context and its further ramifications to Dalit Christians. First, the Bible cannot but be interpreted against the backdrop of the worldview of Hinduism, which kept its sacred book (Vedas) beyond the reach of Dalits; Second, the Bible was an important tool of colonial mission activity, which used it as a means of expounding and expanding the Christian religion. While the first aspect played a major role in the Indian interpretation of the Bible, the second factor also played some role at the beginning of the missionary activity in India.

7.2.1 Bible in the context of colonial mission activity: The Bible finds a welcome home as it arrives in power during the modern missionary era in India, the land of ancient Scriptures. By this time the Bible obviously was dominant in western modes of interpretation. The Bible had to encounter the challenge of Hinduism as against its well developed system of interpretation. In the midst of all this, it was not very easy for the Bible to find its place and get recognition in India at the initial stages. The words of J. S. M. Hooper reveal this point:

It is also to be remembered that India has never suffered from a dearth of religious literature, and that at one end of the scale of her vast population there has always been a section whose religious pride has become proverbial; and this arrogance has been based on the exclusive possession of an ancient sacred literature.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), p. 7. See the case of Vengal Chakkarai below in this regard

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> J. S. M. Hooper, *The Bible in India with a Chapter on Ceylon* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 6.

At the same time the Bible was considered to be the greatest contribution of the west to India. Hooper writes:

If any contribution from the West to India during the last century and a quarter were to be singled out, as of the supreme and fructifying worth, it would be difficult to find any serious rival to the Bible.<sup>22</sup>

Once the Bible found its way and acceptance in India it was the dominant or high caste Christians who first appropriated it and made hermeneutical gains out of it. We shall return to this point later in our next section to argue how the Bible was interpreted and appropriated by the dominant caste Christians in the nineteenth century in India.

The missionary interpretation of the Bible sent some confusing signals to Dalit Christians. This is because, "On the one level, the missionaries projected the Bible as the new Moses, leading an Exodus from caste-ridden Hinduism. But on another level, the missionaries were reluctant to press home the egalitarian potency of the gospel."<sup>23</sup> This attitude is further discussed in terms of missionaries being sensitive to the religious sentiments of Brahmins. For instance the sacrifice and slaughter of cows is offensive to Brahmins and they may see such biblical passages as sacrilegious. Abbé Dubois, a Roman Catholic missionary expresses this clearly:

But, above all, what will a Brahmin or any other well-bred Hindoo think, when he pursues in our holy books the account of the immolating of creatures held most sacred by him? What will be his feelings, when he sees that immolating of oxen and bulls constituted a leading feature in the religious ordinances of the Israelites, and that the blood of those most sacred animals was almost daily shed at the shrine of the god they adored? What will be his feelings when he sees that, after Solomon had at immense expense and labour built a magnificent temple in honour of the true God, he made a *pratisha* or consecration of it by causing 22,000 oxen to be slaughtered, and overflowing his new temple with the blood of these sacred victims?<sup>24</sup>

R. S. Sugirtharajah argues that missionary hermeneutics did not see any inconsistency with the gospel in their affirmation of caste differences. For example,

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 231. For a contrary view see Duncan Forrester, *Caste and Christianity*. Forrester opines: "Egalitarian ideas first introduced to India by Protestant missionaries have shown themselves strikingly attractive to the depressed and transformingly challenging to educated opinion." (p. 201).

<sup>24</sup> Abbé J. A. Dubois, *Letters on the State of Christianity in India* (New Delhi: Associated Publishing House, n.d.), p. 16.

“Robert De Nobili even went on to claim that ‘the caste system as such was not unchristian’. Summoning texts like Matthew 5.17, they were able to endorse the notion that Jesus did not come to abolish social practices but to fulfil them. The Bible was presented as maintaining the status quo, and the missionaries pointed out that neither Jesus nor Paul was against slavery nor actively involved in its eradication.”<sup>25</sup>

On the basis of the above discussion we may get the feeling that missionary activity played no active part in the eradication of the caste system as such in India. At the same time they wanted to proclaim the fact that in Jesus Christ there is neither high nor low and invited all people to embrace this gospel message. This is clearly stated in a Mission report of 1938 as follows:

One hundred years ago the Marquis Wellesley thought that the circulation of the Bible, ‘which taught the doctrine of equality without the safeguard of a commentary,’ seemed unsafe in India. And of course he was right in so far as he wished to maintain status quo. For the Bible is explosive material. It has already produced a bloodless revolution in India. The whole movement for the emancipation of the Untouchables has its roots in Christian conceptions of equality.<sup>26</sup>

Christian missionaries played a very significant and “... exemplary role in teaching the low castes how to avail themselves of new possibilities of uplift and defence (*to protect their legal rights based on the equality of all human beings*).”<sup>27</sup>

7.2.2 Significant features of nineteenth century Indian Christian interpretation of the Bible: An overview: There are certain common and significant features found in the Indian Christian interpretation of the Bible in the nineteenth century. These features clearly point towards the way in which the Bible was contextualised by the Indian Christian interpreters in the nineteenth century.

First, the interpretation of the Bible is taken seriously by the Christian thinkers. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, an educated Hindu social reformer, was interested in the Bible as a handbook of ethics. He learned Greek and Hebrew in order to make a detailed study of the Bible. His thought was influenced by Arianism. He is very selective in

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<sup>25</sup> Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, p. 232.

<sup>26</sup> *The Forty-fifth Report of the South India Provincial Synod* (Mysore: Wesley Press, 1938), p. 126.

<sup>27</sup> Duncan Forrester, *Caste and Christianity*, p. 200. The words of emphasis in the brackets are mine.



his use of the Bible. He published a book in 1820 entitled: *The Precepts of Jesus: The Guide to Peace and Happiness*. In this book he concentrated on the sayings of some words of Jesus based on the Synoptic Gospels leaving out the historical events in the life of Jesus as well as his miracles. According to Kaj Baago, Roy's concern is to "cut away from Christianity that which gives unnecessary offence and to present in a relevant form the essence of what he believed to be the Gospel."<sup>28</sup> This Baago calls Roy's attempt at demythologization of Gospel.<sup>29</sup> Robin Boyd is of the opinion that this attempt of Roy to take only selected portions of the Bible is dangerous. Rather he suggests that "the Christian faith requires of us a deep and balanced study of the *whole* Bible."<sup>30</sup>

Second, the Bible is seen as God's revelation and as a divinely inspired book. Nehemiah Goreh, a prime proponent of this view had been a Hindu scholar before his conversion. He was a trained scholar in Biblical criticism of his day. He made a detailed and critical study of the Gospels and came to the conclusion that the canonical Gospels are reliable documents and so prove beyond dispute the verity of the miracles and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Unlike Ram Mohan Roy, Goreh considers the Bible as divinely inspired and reliable in all its parts. For Goreh, the Bible occupies the status of the veda, the divine *sruti* given by God. Regarding the Old Testament, Goreh opines that many of its character and events as 'types' of the New Covenant and the Old Testament prophecies are 'evidences' of the divine origin and truth of Christian faith.<sup>31</sup> Robin Boyd is of the opinion that Goreh's attempt is similar to any western method of interpretation of the Bible and very little can be deduced in terms of any distinguishing Indian method of interpretation.<sup>32</sup>

Third, the Bible is seen as having parallels in the Hindu texts. Krishna Mohan Banerjea of Bengal was an important Indian Christian theologian using this method

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<sup>28</sup> Kaj Baago, "Ram Mohan Roy's Christianity – An Early attempt at Demythologization?" *BTF* I 1 (1967), p.42.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 30-42.

<sup>30</sup> Boyd, "The Use of the Bible." p. 142.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 143.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*.

of relating the Scriptures of Hinduism and Christianity. In 1875, Banerjea published a book entitled: *The Aryan Witness* in which he wants to show the striking parallels between the Old Testament, especially the Book of Genesis, and the Vedas. He wanted to demonstrate that Christianity was identical with Hinduism. Banerjea writes:

The Fundamental principle of the Gospel were recognised, and acknowledged by ... the Brahminical Aryans of India, and if the authors of the Vedas by any possibility return to the world, they would at once recognise the Indian Christians ... as their own descendants.<sup>33</sup>

Banerjea draws parallels between the Biblical and Vedic concepts in his comparison in the Vedic sacrifice of *Prajapati* ('Lord of Creatures') with the death of Christ. He demonstrates that the historical person, Jesus of Nazareth, is the true *prajapati* "whose name and position correspond to that of the vedic ideal—one mortal and immortal, who sacrificed himself for mankind"<sup>34</sup> Banerjea maintains that in the figure of *Prajapati* redemption of the sinner is possible and the same function is seen in the case of Jesus Christ as the self-sacrificing *Prajapati*.<sup>35</sup> In this sense, Banerjea feels that the Vedas come closer to Christianity than does the Old Testament. He writes:

The Vedic writers say distinctly that the Lord of Creation, himself a Purusha begotten in the beginning, offered himself a sacrifice for the Devas ... They add that the same Lord of Creation was "half mortal, half immortal". This is still nearer an approach to the ideal of our *Immanuel*.<sup>36</sup>

Banerjea's conclusion is that "the Vedas confirm and illustrate Scripture traditions and Scripture facts ... Christianity fills up the vacuum ... in the Vedic account of the sacrifice, by exhibiting the true *Prajapati*—the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world".<sup>37</sup>

Commenting on the biblical method of interpretation of Banerjea, Robin Boyd opines that in the time and context of Banerjea this interpretation of the Bible was the need of the hour. Christian apologists like Banerjea wanted to hold a fruitful

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<sup>33</sup> Kaj Baago, *The Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity* (Madras: CLS, 1969), p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> T. V. Philip (ed) *Krishna Mohan Banerjea: Christian Apologist* (Bangalore: CISRS, 1982), p. 195.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 194.

<sup>36</sup> Kaj Baago, *Pioneers*, p. 16.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*.

dialogue with different traditions of Hinduism and they were successful in their attempts to certain extent. However as Boyd maintains, the method of Banerjea's biblical interpretation may not be convincing in today's context.<sup>38</sup>

Fourth, the authority of the Bible is important yet it is subordinated to experience. Several Indian Christian theologians subscribe to this view. A. J. Appasamy's words in this regard are relevant:

The Scriptures themselves do not possess life. It is folly to think that there is some inherent power in them to give us life. Their most important function is to lead us to the manifestation of the Divine in time.<sup>39</sup>

Another Indian Christian theologian Vengal Chakkarai (of twentieth century), about whom we shall present more details later, confirms that experience of the knowledge of Christ is more important than the Bible itself. He explains:

The New Testament, and especially the Gospels, do not profess to give us the light of the knowledge in the face of Jesus Christ, as St. Paul put it, except as we stand before that august figure, who transforms us from glory to glory, that is from one stage of anubhava to another.<sup>40</sup>

We cannot but invoke the writings of Sadhu Sundar Singh, a prominent Indian Christian theologian, whose direct experiences with Christ are invariably consonant with biblical teaching. Sundar Singh opines:

It is not because I read the Gospel that I know Christ, but because He revealed Himself to me.<sup>41</sup>

The above mentioned theologians primarily think in terms of highest place to be given to their knowledge and experience of Christ, whose place cannot be substituted by any other figure or object and argue that the Bible can serve as an important means to their experience of Christ. Their main intention was to avoid bibliolatry. The words of Sundar Singh clarify the point:

He never dreamt of leaving us alone, and He will be with us to the end of the world; therefore He did not need to leave any written word behind. Then there is another reason

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<sup>38</sup> Boyd, "The Use of the Bible." p. 145.

<sup>39</sup> A. J. Appasamy, *Christianity as Bhakti Marga* (Madras: CLS, 1930), p. 161.

<sup>40</sup> Vengal Chakkarai, *Jesus the Avatar* (Madras: CLS, 1926), p. 165.

<sup>41</sup> Friedrich Heiler, *The Gospel of Sadhu Sundar Singh* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1927), p. 194.

why He wrote nothing. If He had written something in a book, men would have bowed down and worshipped it instead of worshipping the Lord Himself. God's word is only a hand stretched out to point to the way to the Lord who is the Truth and Life.<sup>42</sup>

Robin Boyd argues that even when Sundar Singh gives importance to his direct experience with Christ or what he calls his *pratyaksa*, he nevertheless puts it on the same plane as the Bible. His experience is filled with biblical content.<sup>43</sup> Boyd opines that for Appasamy Scripture (Bible) is the primary and foremost *Pramana* (the standard of our faith).<sup>44</sup> Regarding Appasamy's central concern in the Bible Boyd states: "Christ is the centre of Scripture, it is in his light that we read both Old and New Testaments, and because all Scripture bears witness to him the Bible is our primary 'Rule of Faith' or *pramāna*."<sup>45</sup>

All the Indian Christian theologians of nineteenth century we discussed above emphasize the authority of the Bible. They also weave together the themes of the Vedas with motifs of the Bible. Personal experience with Jesus Christ is significant to all these theologians and the Bible serves as an important means to this experience. All the features discussed above will have a direct or indirect bearing on the interpretations of Psalm 22 by Vengal Chakkarai of the twentieth century and by the Dalit Christians of the twenty first century. The way Psalm 22 is contextualized by Vengal Chakkarai and Dalit Christians is strongly linked to the four concerns we discussed above. We shall return to this point later in this chapter.

### 7.2.3 Vengal Chakkarai's Interpretation of the Bible with specific reference to Psalm 22:

7.2.3.1 Chakkarai's brief life History: Vengal Chakkarai Chetty was born in 1880 in a well-to-do Madras family of chetty caste, the highest non-Brahmin caste, in Tamilnadu. His father was a follower of Vedānta and his mother, whose influence on Chakkarai was great, was a devotee of the *Vaishnava bhakti*. Chakkarai received his early education in a Scottish Mission School and later studied at the Madras

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p. 195.

<sup>43</sup> Boyd, "The Use of the Bible." p. 148.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 156.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*.

Christian College for higher education. In his college education he was influenced by William Millar. Along with his brother-in-law he was converted to the Christian faith.<sup>46</sup> He was eventually baptized in 1903.

Chakkarai worked with the Danish Lutheran Mission in Madras helping them in evangelistic work to reach educated Hindus. He gave up this job as he could not agree with the policy and work of the Mission. Later he devoted his time to the welfare of the labourers, organised the labour union movement and served as the chairman of the Indian trade union congress. Chakkarai was committed to the Indian freedom struggle and was active in politics. He was a member of City Council and in 1941 elected Mayor of the Madras City Corporation for a term. He died in 1958.

Along with his brother-in-law Chenchiah, he was one of the founders of *Christo Samaj*, which advocated the indigenization of the Church. He was one of the foremost contributors to *Rethinking Christianity in India* group along with his brother-in-law Chenchiah. He wrote and edited a weekly paper *The Christian Patriot*. Several of his writings were later published as *Jesus the Avatar* in 1927 and *The Cross and Indian Thought* in 1932.<sup>47</sup>

7.2.3.2 Chakkarai's use and interpretation of the Bible: For Chakkarai the Bible is the supreme and only *pramāna* that stands on its own. He writes:

My view is the downright Indian view which, I think is also the older Protestant view, -- that the Holy Scriptures are the only authority for the determination of the Christian Faith; it is the supreme *Pramana*.... Indian Christians recognise the supreme and infallible authority of the *Sruti*, though theological schools and sects may wrangle about the interpretations.<sup>48</sup>

In the early years of his conversion Chakkarai could not see the Old Testament as a lovable book, because of the way in which it was presented by the missionaries and Christian preachers in contrast to Hinduism. But in the later years, after a careful reading he began to develop an appreciation for the Old Testament and saw its

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<sup>46</sup> *The Guardian*, 20-4-44 cited in R. H. S. Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1969) Reprint 1991, p. 165.

<sup>47</sup> E. C. John, "The Reception of the Old Testament in India," in Joseph George (ed) *The God of All Grace: Essays in honour of Origen Vasantha Jathanna* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation and United Theological College, 2005) p. 6.

<sup>48</sup> *Guardian*, 2-12-43.

relevance in his work with the Trade Union Movement. About the Book of Psalms he writes:

Even now I think that it is only as we grow older that the Psalms become a rare and priceless possession, in which are mirrored as in a stormy ocean the passions of the Human soul, or in a still lake the waiting of the man trusting in God amidst the World's tragedies.<sup>49</sup>

Chakkarai gives three reasons why Christians should give an important place to the Old Testament:

(a) The Old Testament Prophets attained their conception of one God—ethical monotheism—after a long process. As an example of this view, Chakkarai mentions the theological reflection of Deutero-Isaiah after the terrible crisis in the nation of Israel after the Babylonian exile. (b) Chakkarai puts strong emphasis on the realisation of God's righteousness/righteous rule in this world and not in another. "The moral government of the world is to be vindicated by the establishment of His righteousness or Sanathana Dharma, the Indian equivalent of the Hebrew conception".<sup>50</sup> (c) Chakkarai's affinity to the Old Testament is much clearer when he writes: "I love the Old Testament of the Jews – not the mere grace and love of God -- very good at all times, -- with the terrible wrath of God at social and national and now international brigandage, tyranny, arrogance and pride.... I have not read anywhere such denunciations of the luxury, the covetousness, the oppression and exploitation of the wage-earners as in the Old Testament, and St. James in the New Testament is the true inheritor of it".<sup>51</sup>

Chakkarai's exposition of the New Testament is much more profound. His theology is based on Scripture and his description of mysticism or equivalent to *bhakti* is cross centred. His assessment on the theories of atonement includes his study of the temptation of Jesus by Satan which allows him to eventually emerge as victorious Christ. Later he also explains in detail the terms 'ransom' in Mark 10:45 and sacrifice in Psalm 2, Isaiah 42 and 53. For the relationship of the Jesus of history to the Christ of faith, Chakkarai finds his clue in the cry of dereliction (originally in

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<sup>49</sup> *Guardian*, Vol.21, 1943, p. 340.

<sup>50</sup> *Guardian*, 16-6-47.

<sup>51</sup> *Guardian*, Vol. 21, 1943, p. 367.



the Psalm 22) in Mark 15:34 and goes on to expound this in terms of *kenosis* in Philippians 2.<sup>52</sup>

Chakkarai gives great importance to the resurrection of Christ through which he makes the point that the love or *bhakti* of the incarnate Christ is suddenly transformed into the vast spiritual power (*śakti*) of the Spirit. Through the key passage of Romans 1:4 Chakkarai makes his point clear: “Jesus Christ was declared as the Son of God with power (or *śakti*) according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead”.<sup>53</sup> Robin Boyd, commenting on this interpretation of Chakkarai, argues that it draws on the Johannine description of the Spirit as Comforter, Guru and Revealer, as well as on the Lucan description of the Spirit (in the account of Pentecost in Acts 2).<sup>54</sup> Further Boyd opines, “Chakkarai’s Christology can be described as a Christology of the Spirit, and the basis of his teaching is always sought in the Bible—not in any other cluster of ideas or thought-patterns”.<sup>55</sup>

7.2.3.3 Chakkarai’s interpretation of Psalm 22: At the outset it must be stated that Chakkarai did not expound Psalm 22 in detail as in other Bible commentaries. He dealt with the psalm in so far as he talks about the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ and in comparison with the Gethsemane experience of Jesus Christ before the crucifixion. Chakkarai’s explanation of the psalm falls within his overall explanation of the historical Jesus and the Christ of experience. For Chakkarai, the final phase of Jesus’ life in this world was a hard one. Jesus was “friendless, property-less, ... the despised and rejected of men, ... His consciousness or self-consciousness sailed on the dark waves of the Cross (not the physical sufferings alone) with this plank the last refuge of the sufferer. And then came the mysterious

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<sup>52</sup> Boyd, “The Use of the Bible,” p. 153.

<sup>53</sup> Chakkarai, *Jesus the Avatar*, pp. 148-49.

<sup>54</sup> Boyd, “The Use of the Bible.” p. 154.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

cry: 'My God, My God' why hast thou forsaken me?'"<sup>56</sup> Chakkarai gives a personal touch to the cry of dereliction when he writes:

Here I want to say that this cry of dereliction it was that made me think of Jesus as a mysterious being and led me ultimately to accept Him as my Lord and Redeemer.<sup>57</sup>

Chakkarai employs the Indian and Hindu terms and goes on to explain his points in detail. The statements on the cross and death of Jesus Christ are integrally connected with the cry of dereliction as we see in the words of the psalmist in Psalm 22.

Chakkarai's Indian interpretation is clearly seen in his description of the cross and its relation to the cry of dereliction. He writes:

The Cross was foolishness to the Greek—sheer irrationality and *avidyā*, and a rock of offence to the patriotic Jew. On the contrary, the Christian *bhakta*, as St. Paul put it, glorified in its inexplicable mystery, as the *śakti*, *jñānā* and *dharma* of *Īśvara* Himself, the power, wisdom and righteousness of God.<sup>58</sup>

For Chakkarai, the cross was at the centre of Christian faith in Christ. He has the following to say when he claims the cross as the central focus of his discussion and in relation to the cry of abandonment of Jesus Christ. (i) The cross was at the centre of Christ's mind (in the mind of *Bhagavān*, described by Chakkarai) from the beginning of his ministry. It was also at the centre of Christ's teaching (*upadēśa*). Without the death and the Cross there is no meaning given to his ministry.<sup>59</sup> In other words, Chakkarai sums up, "The Cross was, therefore, an organic and organizing fact of His *ātma jñāna* and *jñāna dṛṣṭi* from the very beginning".<sup>60</sup> (ii) In the teachings of Jesus Christ to his disciples the cross and his death dominate. Chakkarai picks up the passages from Mark 8:27 - 10:48 with the three-fold prediction of Christ's Passion and death in a well known condensed formula in Mark 8:31. (iii) Christ felt the divine necessity of his death as it was a preordained

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<sup>56</sup> P. T. Thomas (ed) *The Theology of Chakkarai: with Selections from his Writings* (Bangalore: CISRS, 1968), p. 97.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> P. T. Thomas (ed) *Vengal Chakkarai: An Introduction to Chakkarai's Life and Thought* Vol. I, Library of Indian Christian Theology – 3. (Madras: CLS, 1981), p. 257.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

one (based on Mark 8:31 and Luke 22:22). However, Chakkarai contends that how Christ reached this conclusion is impossible to say. Chakkarai is of the view that it is only God who knows his ways with Christ because it is utterly secret (*parama rahasya*).<sup>61</sup> (iv) Christ entered into his death through a voluntary act. But at the same time Christ is the priest and the sacrificial cow (*yajña paśu*). “Though Christ was crucified by human hands, he was the sacrificer and the victim”. And this “victim is the *sūtradhāra*, the stage-manager also, the supreme actor and the supreme creator”.<sup>62</sup> Chakkarai applies this idea by comparing it with a verse in *Bhagavadgītā* ix.16. He quotes from *Gītā*:

I the oblation; I the sacrifice; I the ancestral offering. I the fire giving heat; the *mantram* I; I also the butter; I the fire; the burnt offering I.<sup>63</sup>

(v) The agony of Christ (*Bhagavān*) in the Garden of Gethsemane and his heart breaking cry on the cross are mysteries. Chakkarai observes that this experience of *Bhagavān* remains somewhat mysterious. At the same time this experience is a very dreadful and agonising moment for Jesus Christ. With the agony of Job (4:13-16), Chakkarai compares the agony of the human suffering and the experience of the cross in the cry of abandonment. Chakkarai has the following to say about the cry of abandonment of Jesus Christ by God:

(a) The ingratitude of men and their malice must have produced a feeling of utter heart-brokenness. Except for a few faithful women, all people including his disciples had left him alone on the cross. This created a sense of utter desolation for Jesus Christ. (b) Jesus Christ bore the sins of the human beings on the cross. This must have produced the terrible shock that found expression in his words of abandonment.<sup>64</sup> Chakkarai further notes, “to Him (Jesus Christ) the withdrawal of His Father’s face, was the greatest horror of existence. Just as the lotus shuts its petals when the sun sets, so the darkness of the Death closed upon Him and His mighty *ātman* shrank into the dark and terrible place to struggle alone with its

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 263-64.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 267-68.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p. 268.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, p. 275.

forces, the 'powers and principalities' as they are called in the New Testament."<sup>65</sup>

(c) For Jesus Christ, God was not only the supreme Reality but the One without a second. When this awareness was destroyed, "it may be for a few minutes even, He descended to the lowest deep than which there was no lower deep; ... The only plank beneath him was carried away, and He plunged into the *nirvana* or *suniam* where God is not, from which He arose and the creational order. Such is the language used in ancient Hindu scriptures."<sup>66</sup> This Chakkarai calls the experience of *kenosis*, describing it as the process of self-emptying according to Philippians 2, after which glorification of Jesus took place and then "He became the divine human indwelling Christ."<sup>67</sup> Robin Boyd rightly points out, "Chakkarai sees the death of Christ as the supreme *niṣkāmya karma*, the supreme act of self-abnegation. And the *bhakta* who is devoted to Christ, who is justified by his faith in him, must be conformed to Christ's pattern, and wrought on the same anvil."<sup>68</sup>

Robin Boyd, commenting on the Chakkarai's use of the Bible states that: "Some of his (Chakkarai's) exegesis may be questionable, but he never fails to make Scripture his point of departure. Here is the man who starts from the *śruti* and the direct *anubhava* of Christ, and proceeds to elucidate his theology on that basis, using a fully Indian terminology in the process. It is a very illuminating demonstration."<sup>69</sup> For instance, Chakkarai compares the cry of dereliction on the cross to any other human cry both presented in the Bible (Genesis 15:12; Job 4:13-16) and in *Bhagavadgītā* (xi. 35). Chakkarai saw the experience of horror and darkness by Abraham as a real human experience while performing *yajña* (sacrifice). Chakkarai compared Job with an Israelite *rṣi* whose cry of anguish was a formless form. In a similar way in the anguish of Jesus Christ in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross the horror of the great darkness invades the soul of Christ. And in the *Bhagavadgītā* Arjuna was filled with terror before the *visvarūpa darśana* (the

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, p. 276.

<sup>66</sup> P. T. Thomas (ed) *The Theology of Chakkarai*, p. 98.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>68</sup> Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, p. 179.

<sup>69</sup> Boyd, "The Use of the Bible." p. 154.

revelation of the divine mystery). On the basis of all these Chakkarai concludes that the experience of the cross and this cry of dereliction can be compared with the agonising experience of any Christian *bhakta*.<sup>70</sup>

Like any other Indian Christian theologian of the nineteenth century, Chakkarai weaves together the themes of the vedas and other Hindu Scriptures with motifs from the Bible. Chakkarai's Christology from his interpretation of Psalm 22 is that the cry of abandonment of Jesus Christ on the cross was something decisive in the life of Jesus Christ. Chakkarai talks about the cry of dereliction of Jesus Christ on the cross as the process of the climax of divine and human *kenosis*. This process can be described thus: "man's self-emptying is reciprocated by God's self-giving. God's saving Word pours in, in all its fullness, in response to the self-emptying of the flesh. Man's *bhakti* and God's *sakti* are historically merged."<sup>71</sup> Chakkarai himself puts this idea as follows: "the first Easter joined together energy and love, laying the foundation of the Christian view of the *Avatar* of God in Jesus Christ."<sup>72</sup>

Chakkarai's explanation of Psalm 22 is basically done in the light of Jesus' cry of dereliction. This cry of abandonment is similar to any other human cry of agony and suffering. It is a mysterious cry of Jesus on the cross. Moreover God's love is manifested on the cross that gives life and hope to those who believe in him. For Chakkarai the cry of dereliction is foundational to his personal *anubhava* (experience) of Christ and the *śruti* (Bible) confirms this. It is also the climactic cry of divine kenosis. In the cry of dereliction we see the final phase of Jesus' self emptying process after which "He became the divine human indwelling Christ."<sup>73</sup>

As noted earlier like any other nineteenth century Indian Christian theologian, Chakkarai attaches a lot of importance to the Bible and personal experience. But unlike Sundersingh and others, Chakkarai regards his personal experience as secondary to the Bible. Unlike Banarjea and others, Chakkarai uses Hindu terms

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<sup>70</sup> Vengal Chakkarai, *The Cross and Indian Thought* (Madras: CLS, 1932), pp. 106-07.

<sup>71</sup> D. Alphonse, "Jesus Christ, the Avatar," *Vaiharai* 7: 4 (2002), p. 33.

<sup>72</sup> Vengal Chakkarai, "Indian Christianity, and its Critics," *The Guardian* 22 (1944), pp. 185-86.

<sup>73</sup> P. T. Thomas (ed) *The Theology of Chakkarai*, p. 98.

and words in a limited way to explain the Christian concepts.<sup>74</sup> Being a ‘high’ caste Hindu convert, Chakkarai is not influenced by the Hindu doctrine of karma in his explanation of the theology of the cross in the cry of dereliction of Jesus. Although Chakkarai himself has not directly addressed the issue of karma in his treatment of Psalm 22, his overall explanation points towards the affirmation—“Is not the Gospel, in effect, the good news, that Christ, by taking the whole burden of our ‘karma’ upon Himself, has broken its power over us and made us free?”<sup>75</sup>—later A. G. Hogg and others addressed it. Similar to some of the Sanskritic exegetes, his explanation of the psalm is also “mystical to the logical meaning, the spiritual to the historical.”<sup>76</sup>

### 7.3 Dalit Interpretation of the Bible

In this section we shall argue that the Dalit Christians under the influence of the Hindu ways of thinking, particularly the karma doctrine, in interpreting Psalm 22, differ from such a view. Moreover Christian Dalit interpretations on Psalm 22 seek to find their answer to the problem of karma in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We discuss the details in this section with the following questions in mind: what are the presuppositions of the Dalit Christians when they interpret Psalm 22 from their Hindu background? How are the interpretations influenced by Hindu categories? How do they perceive the karma doctrine in the light of their overall Christian message and in the light of Psalm 22 in particular? How is the interpretation of Psalm 22 helpful for claiming an authentic Christian experience in the light of their present suffering? How far is the nineteenth century Indian Christian interpretation of the Bible helpful for Dalit Christians? What are the distinct features of a Dalit Christian interpretation of the Bible and Psalm 22 in particular?

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<sup>74</sup> For instance Chakkarai employs the following Sanskrit terms to explain them in a Christian way: *śruti* (Bible), *anubhava* (experience in Christ), *Bhagavān* (God, Christ), *Karma* (sin).

<sup>75</sup> Chakkarai, *The Cross and Indian Thought*, p. 31. See also Gurukul Theological Research Group of the Tamilnad Research Council, *A Christian Theological Approach to Hinduism: Being Studies in the Theology of A. J. Appasamy, V. Chakkarai and P. Chenchiah* (Madras: CLS, 1956), p. 48.

<sup>76</sup> Boyd, “The Use of the Bible.” p. 153.



7.3.1 Psalm 22 in the light of Hindu Concept of Karma: At the very outset it should be stated that the karma concept seems contrary to the interpretation of Psalm 22 in the light of the passion and cross of Jesus Christ. This is because of the very fundamental understanding of the Hindu concept of karma. Jesus was crucified and suffered and died on the cross not because of his own karma but through his voluntary act of suffering and solidarity with the marginalised communities.<sup>77</sup> Having mentioned this, we need to show how the interpretation of Psalm 22 by Dalit Christians is useful to resolve this issue.

Dalit Christians are fed with the inferiority complex and fear that their present status is the result of their 'fate' and this fatalistic view is internalised into their minds. Some Indian leaders who are involved in the community development of the poor and oppressed communities agree that the sense of low self esteem impinged by the religious beliefs is a major problem. Vishal Mangalwadi acknowledges this when he states:

Poverty is not their (poor and Dalit communities) main problem. The lack of hope (for better tomorrow), lack of faith (in human and God's power) and lack of initiative (born out of dehumanizing oppression and loss of self-confidence) are the paralysing mental/cultural factors which prevent them from any action towards freedom and development.<sup>78</sup>

Therefore the need for Dalit Christians is not only to alleviate their poverty but also to remove a sense of guilt and fear that they are forgiven and they are not subjected to any *karma* imposed on them. Based on the study of missionary impact on Dalit converts to Christianity from South Tamilnadu, Samuel Jayakumar has the following to say with regard to the importance of karma in the converts.

[M]issionaries taught the depressed class Christians who they were in Christ when they became Christians: telling them that they were no more sinners, no more subject to *Karma* and the cycle of rebirth, because of what God had done for them through Jesus Christ. This understanding of the children of God provided the depressed class Christians with a new self-image and new identity in society. In most cases they were provided with the sense of

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<sup>77</sup> This is the general understanding of Christian Dalits as they were taught, at least in the initial stages of their conversion by the Christian missionaries. See the quote of note 79 below.

<sup>78</sup> Vishal Mangalwadi, "A Theology of Power in the context of Social Development," *TRACI Journal* (April, 1981), p. 15.

belonging to the body of Christ and the universal family of God in which there is no distinction or discrimination.<sup>79</sup>

Interpreting Psalm 22, a Dalit Christian preacher proclaims the message in the light of his own understanding of history of oppression by the Aryan invasion and at the same time the preacher is of the firm belief that Jesus Christ is the liberator as he became incarnate for us in this world. The preacher here employs the Hindu concept of *avatāra* (incarnation) to convey his idea of Jesus Christ, the *avatāra* of God.

Aryans have oppressed and controlled Dalits long before their present oppression.... Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ we have strong hope in spite of all our present struggles. Jesus Christ was incarnated for us and became our *avatara purushan* (incarnated man).<sup>80</sup>

D. Alphonse argues that the *avatar* Christology presented by Indian Christian theologians, particularly Vengal Chakkarai is very helpful in an Indian context, where millions of people, particularly, the Dalits are subjected to massive poverty and other kinds of injustice. "The concept of *avatar* implies an inescapable dimension of liberative action in so far as its very *raison d'être* is nothing else than the overcoming of the historical evil and the establishment of the rule of justice and righteousness here on earth."<sup>81</sup>

In another case, a Dalit group, in their discussion on the suffering in this world consciously or unconsciously, express the view that they suffer in this world as a result of their fate and at the same time Jesus Christ is able to deliver them from such a fate and will deliver them from all kinds of present suffering. Obviously an Indian Christian, under the influence of Hinduism, tends to think that his present suffering is nothing but the karma of his previous life or at least the sins committed in this life.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Samuel Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion: Historical Resources for a Contemporary Debate* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), p. 356.

<sup>80</sup> Text 1 – October 24, 2004.

<sup>81</sup> D. Alphonse, "Jesus Christ, the Avatar." p. 35.

<sup>82</sup> Commentary 1 – October 24, 2004.

In some cases Dalit preachers do realise that karma is something not inherent in Christian teaching but it is imposed on them or it is alien to them. The preachers also warn that Dalits are oppressed in this way in the name of a religious belief or sentiment. The words of the Dalit pastor preaching to his congregation on Psalm 22 made this point very clear:

Because of our ignorance our oppressors have created fear and ruled us for many years. We are made to believe in our fate and our suffering is the cause of our fate. Many of our people do not know that we have a Dalit God in and through Jesus Christ. In a Dalit context we need to know about our social stigma, of our caste oppression by creating a myth that we are born in a low caste and we are therefore untouchables ... Dalits are made objects of fun and mockery as the psalmist is put into the same experience in verses 6-7... Similar kind of fear, assault, violence, rejection, threat etc experienced by the psalmist until verse 21 of Psalm 22 is part of everyday Dalit life. We see Dalits are oppressed in the name of religion.<sup>83</sup>

At the same time the preacher is careful to insist that Christians are not supposed to be disheartened as they find their saviour in Jesus Christ, who is above all the fatalistic imposition of their Hindu neighbours.

For our sake Jesus Christ suffered on the Cross. For the sake of downtrodden Christ suffered but through Resurrection hope and victory is granted to those who believed him. In our Dalit situation, we no longer need to carry the feeling that we suffer because of our fate, rather we have a saviour who changes our fate of suffering into a joy of salvation and we are the free human beings without any guilt of our sins.<sup>84</sup>

Speaking on the demythologization of karma theory based on the Book of Job, Devasahayam argues that in the story of Job the myth of karma theory is exploded when God finally answers Job quashing the judgment of Job's friends, whose main contention with Job was that Job is suffering because of his guilt or sins. Job becomes very frustrated when his friends maintained that God is a just God and that God rewards or punishes according to merit. Reward is symbolised in riches and health, and punishment in poverty and sickness. But towards the end Job's friends are proved to be wrong when the accusers become the accused and the accused is acquitted. The myth that God punished Job for his sins is totally shattered.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Text 9 – November 28, 2004.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> V. Devasahayam, "Job: Demythologization of Karma Theory," in V. Devasahayam (ed) *Dalits & Women: Quest for Humanity* (Madras: Gurukul, 1992), pp. 227-31.

Using the theory of karma, caste people oppress Dalits by injecting an inferiority complex in them, a sense that their situation is absolutely unchangeable. Religion legitimizes the existence of caste system and thus it is impossible to eradicate.

Because of this, Dalits are stigmatized and they mentally suffer.<sup>86</sup> A similar kind of helplessness is expressed in one of the sermons on Psalm 22 by a Dalit preacher. The preacher compares the situation of Christian Dalits with that of the psalmist in Psalm 22 and says:

Suffering is superimposed on Dalits. We are born to the parents who do not have any voice in the society. We are placed in permanent slavery and helplessness in our mind and body. Because of his physical and mental suffering the psalmist has become a laughing stock ... Dalits continue to suffer the evils of caste violence, untouchability ... We are injected with an inferiority complex in our mind from our birth as low caste people. This feeling is created in us by the upper caste people. We were told by the upper caste people that it is our fate to suffer as low caste people in this world because of our birth. We were told that we are not meant for education, we have no intelligent mind. We are made to live with this kind of low self esteem always for several centuries. Even our Churches are divided on these issues. People laugh at us because we are Dalits, working with dead animals and human bodies. The upper caste people reproach us because of our birth status. We are injected with the guilt feeling that our sins are responsible for our present suffering. We have no other alternative except to live in this karma. We need to carry on with this burden in our mind all along our life in this world. Who will deliver us from our present karma that is imposed on us?<sup>87</sup>

After expressing this kind of helplessness, the preacher then turns the attention of the congregation to the only possible hope in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

None has elevated our position in the society. In such a terrible condition we have the only hope in our God. In our dalitness God is our strength and refuge. It is Christ himself who had gone through similar kinds of experience. He is standing with us in our fallen and broken situation. He will rescue us and fill us with his resurrection power so that we become equal human beings with the rest of the people in this world.<sup>88</sup>

While many Christian Dalits are still enslaved or made to be enslaved by the Hindu doctrine of karma, there are also certain corrections suggested by the Indian theologians or the theologians from the West who devoted their time and energy to the comparative study of karma of Hinduism and Christian understanding of redemption. The reinterpretation of karma in the light of Christian Gospel message or

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<sup>86</sup> S. K. Chatterji, "Some Aspects of Dalit Ideology," in A. P. Nirmal (ed) *Towards a Common Dalit Ideology* (Madras: Gurukul, n.d.), p. 13.

<sup>87</sup> Text 11 – December 5, 2004.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

the message of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ was seen as helpful to a meaningful dialogue between Christians and their Hindu neighbours. These suggestions are somewhat helpful to Christian Dalits in their proper understanding of the gospel message in Indian context. Prominent among them are A. G. Hogg<sup>89</sup>, Richard DeSmet<sup>90</sup> and others.

A. G. Hogg argues that the doctrine of karma provides a logical theory of punishment, and offers to explain the inequalities of man's lot. But it assumes that no sin ever deserves more than a finite penalty. Hogg opines that Christians cannot agree with that teaching. He writes:

It may be fairly claimed ... that Christian thought, with something like unanimity, accepts the apostolic declaration that 'the wages of sin is death', at least in this sense, that potentially sin merits a mysterious infinite penalty. Now Hinduism has just as uniformly avoided this position. Its teaching implies that under no conditions do the deserts of sin become infinite.<sup>91</sup>

Dalit preachers in their address to the Dalit congregations in the interpretation of Psalm 22 make it clear that Christians are made to believe that their present suffering is the cause of their karma and that their fate cannot be changed. At the same time Jesus Christ, because of his unfailing love towards us fallen humanity has redeemed us from all kinds of bondage and sins including any guilt and feeling of 'fatalistic' view of suffering in this world. Arguing about God's infinite love in this world, Hogg expresses the view that divine love can transcend all that may be evil in this world. He writes:

The Christian does not need to prove the world to be perfect before he can venture to call it God's world. He only needs to show it to be a world such that infinite Love can express itself therein. He does not require to prove that evil is totally absent; he only requires to show that divine Love, having created the possibility of sonship by the grant of human freedom, can joyfully triumph by self-sacrifice over the evil to which human wills give birth.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> A. G. Hogg's prominent works in relation to his discussion on the Hindu doctrine of karma in the light of Christian understanding are: *Karma and Redemption* (Madras: CLS, 1909), revised version in 1970; *The Christian Message to the Hindu* (London: SCM Press, 1947).

<sup>90</sup> Richard DeSmet's works in relation to the Hindu doctrine of karma and its implications for Christian understanding are: "Fleeting Time," pp. 119-44; "Job's," pp. 308-18.

<sup>91</sup> Hogg, *Karma and Redemption*, p. 45.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

Eric Sharpe, commenting on this position of Hogg writes: “Hogg sees a possibility here of reinterpreting the law of *karma* in a Christian sense. Given that evil actions bear evil fruits, and good actions good fruits, it is possible—indeed inevitable—that those fruits fall on others than their originators. This he (Hogg) characterizes as ‘a law of ethical causation’.”<sup>93</sup> Further Hogg opines that God may also share in the sins of humanity in order that he may bring redemption to the sinful humanity. To clarify this Hogg writes in detail:

It follows that if God is freely and fully to express Himself the universal order must have at least two inviolable laws or principles. It must have the karmic law, the law that if sin enters the phenomenal system penalty must enter too. It must also have the law of salvation, the law that if sin enters the phenomenal system God shall be compelled ... by all the moral forces of the nature to throw the whole infinitude of His being into the phenomenal system, that is to incarnate Himself in order to abolish sinfulness.. God cannot express Himself fully in the punishment of sin; He can express Himself fully only if with the punishment goes a total forth putting of His nature in an effort to destroy sinfulness ... If God had not incarnated Himself in Christ the grand gospel would not have been, for God would not have been the God He is. And if Christ had not endured the karmic lot of man with divine faithfulness even unto death, then also the grand gospel would not have been, for there would have been no infinite power of regeneration. The story of the Christ is not the story of a divine expedient; it is the revelation of the in most necessities of the being of God.<sup>94</sup>

Several years after Hogg, DeSmet argued for the similar reinterpretation of the Hindu doctrine of karma in the light of Christ’s meaningful suffering (based on 1 Peter 3:18-21), death and resurrection. DeSmet writes:

Thus Christ’s meaningful suffering and rewarding resurrection have introduced into human life a meaningfulness ... They have broken open the exclusivism which confined karma and its sequels with the individual doer: the evil deeds done by the unrighteous are requited by the sufferings of the Righteous One. Moreover, the latter takes up our good deeds and undeserved suffering and renders meritorious by merging them with his own and making us partakers of his blissful resurrection. Action is now a field of reciprocity within the limitless merit of his unique sacrifice. It is the field of love in solidarity, of love not only affective but effective of the good of all.<sup>95</sup>

The position of the Christian Dalits can be looked at in the same way as Hogg and DeSmet argued above. In the Dalit preachers’ address on Psalm 22 they seemed to have become resigned to the Hindu view of karma and at the same time they have a

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<sup>93</sup> Eric Sharpe, *The Theology of A. G. Hogg* (Madras: CLS, 1971), p. 40.

<sup>94</sup> Hogg, *Karma and Redemption*, pp. 101ff.

<sup>95</sup> DeSmet, “Job’s.” p. 318.



firm belief that Jesus Christ can liberate them from such a feeling of guilt and a sense of feeling. And at another level Dalit Christians have started to voice their angry cry of protest against the legitimacy of the caste system and against the systematic, organized violence savagely lashed out on them in the name of religion.<sup>96</sup> A Dalit Christian preaching on Psalm 22, while interpreting the agony and anguish of the psalmist and comparing it with that of the Dalit situation contends that the fatalistic view is imposed on them making the Dalits believe in the myth of karma.<sup>97</sup> Thus Dalit Christian preachers argue that the suffering of the psalmist in Psalm 22 is in complete agreement with theirs and their suffering will be removed as they will eventually be liberated from all kinds of physical and mental bondage in and through the liberating act of Christ.

#### **7.4 Distinctive Features of Dalit Interpretation of Psalm 22**

On the basis of our foregoing discussion of how the Bible in general and Psalm 22 in particular is interpreted/reinterpreted under the influence of the Hindu doctrine of karma, we can make the following comments of evaluation so as to see the distinctive features of Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22 both in its own right and in dialogue with the dominant caste Indian interpretation of the Bible of nineteenth and twentieth century in India.

Firstly, the Dalit interpretation of the Bible in general and Psalm 22 in particular is very illuminating even when such interpretation is carried out under the influence of the Hindu doctrine of karma. At the outset Christian Dalits seemed to have been discouraged by the imposition of karma theory in their minds. Yet there are strong voices not to accept this so called myth that a Christian suffers because of his/her sinful acts of either previous or present life. Therefore Christian Dalits protest and express their anger against such an imposition on them. When they interpret Psalm 22 this is explicitly stated. While some interpreters use the Book of Job as a direct case for demythologization of karma theory per se, our study on Psalm 22 clearly indicates that, like the psalmist, the Dalits feel they are victimised, dehumanised and

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<sup>96</sup> For some details on this point see Antony Raj, "Disobedience: A Legitimate Act for Dalit Liberation," in A. P. Nirmal (ed) *Towards a Common Dalit Ideology*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>97</sup> See Text 9 – November 28, 2004.

their social world collapsed in their humiliating treatment by the so called upper caste people. Like the psalmist in Psalm 22, Christian Dalits feel the pain of suffering imposed on them.

Secondly, the Dalit Christian interpretation of Psalm 22 takes into account the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ as an inseparable element in their lives in the midst of their present crisis related to karma. Although the feeling of the burden of karma is present in their lives, Christian Dalits experience strong hope and confidence because of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Psalm 22 is viewed by Christian Dalits in the light of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In fact, some Dalit Christian theologians interpret and preach on Psalm 22 as a prophecy fulfilled in the cross of Jesus Christ. One such Dalit Christian voice interprets Psalm 22 as follows:

Our Lord had clearly remembered Psalm 22 in his heart or else on the cross it struck to our Lord. Actually this psalm is literally fulfilled on the cross of Jesus Christ.... Several words of Psalm 22 are nothing but the words fulfilled on the cross.... The words of Jesus on the cross from Psalm 22 depict the picture of his total humanness and in those words he identified with the marginalised in our society. By entering into a new experience of suffering, Christ has liberated us from the bondage of sin. This psalm helps us to believe that Christ identified with the abandoned ones, the marginalised Dalits in our society.<sup>98</sup>

The message of the cross and resurrection as the Gospel message came to Dalit Christians as a ray of hope in the midst of their physical and mental suffering. Dalit Christians seek liberation not only from the physical oppression, slavery and serfdom but also from their social stigma and almost total degradation. They emphasize this is only possible through salvation in Jesus Christ. Two things in particular are offered to Dalit Christians, as a result of their putting strong faith in the liberating message of Jesus Christ, which are closely interrelated. One is a new self-image as a person whom God in fact loves and has already forgiven. The other is hope, for eternal life, also a life free from cringing fear and terrified subservience here and now. Because of these, Dalit Christians have gained a sense of identity with and belonging to the universal family of God where there is no discrimination of human beings based on

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<sup>98</sup> The following words are translated by me from Telugu language from the devotional book of Govada Dyvaseervadam, *Siluvulo Virigina Shariram*, pp. 67-70. The meaning of the title of the book in English is: "The broken body and the spilled blood on the cross."

caste. Moreover, Dalit Christians, by accepting the message of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, are freed from their guilt and the karma imposed on them. This is why the Indian Christian interpretations of karma are helpful to Dalit liberation and emancipation. When such interpretations give a Christian meaning to Hindu karma, Dalits are reassured that they are free from their 'karma' because of their hope in Jesus Christ. In this sense the Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22 is firmly centred on the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, the Dalit Christian interpretation of Psalm 22 is distinct in comparison with other dominant caste interpretations of nineteenth and twentieth century Indian Christians. The distinction is not in terms of a distinct contrast between the two but of a difference in emphasis. The distinction is particularly seen in terms of interpreting Psalm 22 in the light of the humanity of Jesus as against divinity of Christ noticeable in the case of Vengal Chakkarai. In the case of Chakkarai the emphasis falls more on the divine power of Jesus Christ rather than the human identity of Jesus. For Dalit Christians, the dalitness of Jesus as a human being is more appropriate to their present suffering. Jesus suffered shame, pain, insult, and mockery just as Dalits experience it in their daily lives. This human predicament of Jesus is profound for Dalit Christians since it gives them solidarity with their own predicament.

Chakkarai's discussion of the cross of Jesus Christ in relation to his cry of abandonment is basically interpreted in terms of Christ's atonement on the cross for the sins of the humanity. For Chakkarai this atonement of Christ is to be interpreted in terms of the moral, the metaphysical and the cosmic.<sup>99</sup> Chakkarai's views on the cross are summarised as follows. On the cross: "it is God himself grappling with human sin,"<sup>100</sup> "God's own suffering on account of the sin of human beings,"<sup>101</sup> "the triumph over Satan," "the virtual ruler of the world,"<sup>102</sup> "the divine sacrifice

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<sup>99</sup> Chakkarai, *The Cross and Indian Thought*, p. 20.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, p. 188f

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 168,175.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, p. 119.

redeeming the whole cosmos,”<sup>103</sup> and “the Cross is an act of new creation.”<sup>104</sup>

Commenting on this description of the Cross in the thought of Vengal Chakkarai, the Gurukul Theological Research group of the Tamilnadu Christian Council comments: “But these occasional glimpses of the author’s conception of the Cross are lost in the nebulous reasonings through which he tries to relate it to Indian thought. Thereby the religious aspect of the Cross is too often lost in metaphysical categories.”<sup>105</sup>

All through his discussion Chakkarai maintains that the cry of abandonment by Jesus on the cross is seen and must remain mysterious. Chakkarai’s description of the cross and the suffering of Christ on that cross “are transformed into the radiant *Śakti* of his redemptive sacrifice, and so become the active energy or *kriya Śakti* of a new world order.”<sup>106</sup> This idea of Chakkarai is helpful for the Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22 in the light of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ although Chakkarai himself has not indicated it. Jesus’ dalitness is symbolized at its best on the cross. It is on the cross that we see him as the broken one, the one crushed, rejected, cast out of the city—a true Dalit. He hangs on the cross exposing the highest measure of dehumanization.

The cross is also the price he had to pay for his identification with the Dalits, his solidarity with the poor and the outcasts and his confrontation with the powerful who oppress them. Thus the cross has become a powerful symbol through which Jesus gave meaning and hope to millions of Dalits who are subjected to such suffering. In this sense the cross becomes power or divine *Śakti* of Christ’s redemption.

Chakkarai does not give less importance to the humanity of Jesus. For Chakkarai, Christ is a real human being in the fullest sense of the word. “He is the true man, the ideal man, the man in all men.”<sup>107</sup> But, his description of the divinity of Jesus is far more elaborate while his description of the humanity of Jesus hardly surfaces. Obviously this is not only the case with Chakkarai but with other nineteenth century

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, p. 283.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.

<sup>105</sup> *A Christian Theological Approach to Hinduism*, p. 43.

<sup>106</sup> Chakkarai, *The Cross and Indian Thought*, p. 87.

<sup>107</sup> Chakkarai, *Jesus the Avatar*, p. 30.

Indian Christian theologians. While discussing two nineteenth century Bengal theologians, Sathianathan Clarke makes this point clear:

I am asking if it was the caste and class bias of status quo conscious Brahmin/ Hindu-Christians that refused to recognize the most obvious socioeconomic markers of the human Jesus? Was the human identity of Jesus that is conscripted through his socioeconomic locatedness an embarrassment to these Hindu-Christian theologians? Were they attempting to pass off Jesus as a pure-caste who was the ideal of their Brahmin seers and sages?<sup>108</sup>

What Chakkarai was doing then is in a sense relevant for his own time. While the Dalit interpretation on Psalm 22 takes into account the identity of Jesus' humanity, Indian Christian theologians like Chakkarai give prominence to the divinity of Jesus Christ as he describes the cross as the power that carries out the work of forgiveness and renewal. Moreover for Chakkarai, the cross releases *power*, spiritual *śakti*. In some mysterious way the cross 'opens a channel' in the heart of man, by which the divine *śakti* flows in a mighty stream into the history of humanity.<sup>109</sup> To empower the powerless Christian Dalits, both the divinity and humanity of Jesus are supposed to be upheld. The words of Sathianathan Clarke are illuminating in this regard:

I have submitted that to empower the powerless and the afflicted, Indian Christian theology needs to recover both (a) the distinct social locatedness and the concrete social praxis of Jesus and (b) the tangible aspects of the cosmic potency of Jesus ... Indian Christian theology needs confidence to know and trust Jesus as the one in solidarity with the lowly and afflicted; and imagination to hold both these dimensions together in the God-man.<sup>110</sup>

This kind of holding together both the divine-human dimensions of Jesus Christ will be helpful for an authentic and integral interpretation of Psalm 22 for Dalit Christians. In this sense twentieth century Indian Christian interpretations of the Bible can help to illuminate and complement Dalit Christ in interpretation of Psalm 22. The divinity of Jesus is more able and more powerful. The power of Christ does not stem only from his being in solidarity with the oppressed. It is much more. It is manifested through the cross of Christ as it releases power and spiritual *śakti*. Similar

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<sup>108</sup> Sathianathan Clarke, "The Jesus of Nineteenth Century Indian Christian Theology: An Indian Inculturation with Continuing Problems and Prospects," *Studies in World Christianity* Volume 5.1 (1999), p. 40.

<sup>109</sup> Chakkarai, *Jesus the Avatar*, p. 71.

<sup>110</sup> Sathianathan Clarke, "The Jesus of Nineteenth Century." pp. 43-44.

themes can be noticed in Dalit religion when we talk about other Dalit gods and goddesses. Sathianathan Clarke makes this point clear when he writes:

Ellaiyamman is not a goddess who merely suffers with her people. She is also the embodiment of Divine cosmic powers. Her *sakthi* (power) is cosmic: she controls nature, the demons, the spirits, and, at times, even the gods.<sup>111</sup>

In times of suffering and oppression Dalit Christians look for their source of faith and hope not only in the humanity of Jesus, but also in the divine power of Jesus, who conquered evil forces or in the expression of Vengal Chakkarai and the Bible 'the powers and principalities.' Moreover Vengal Chakkarai's description of the cry of abandonment of Jesus Christ on the Cross and its implications for *kenosis* is seen as relevant for a Dalit Christian interpretation of Psalm 22 as well. The words of Maria Arul Raja affirm the same point:

This deliberate decision of self-abasement by Jesus unto death has the twin dimension of (1) the obedience to God (2) whose heartbeat is absolute solidarity with the innocent sufferers. In other words, the slave-deity has to undergo the salvific suffering as the divine necessity (*dei*) in order to alleviate the dehumanising suffering in the act of his absolute solidarity. As the result of this human decision of Jesus, he was highly exalted to be the Lord of the universe.<sup>112</sup>

## 7.5 Conclusion

The Dalit Christian interpretation of Psalm 22 is unique since it is based on Dalit experience. The Dalit Christian interpretation of Psalm 22, although influenced by the Hindu doctrine of karma, nevertheless questions its imposition on Christian Dalits. It also gives serious thought to the fact that the misery and injustice faced by the Dalits is not God given—it is a human creation—and it can and must be changed. The Dalit interpretation strongly affirms the fact that even in the midst of suffering and humiliation, the exalted power of Christ and the human identity of Jesus is helpful in removing the guilt and sin of the karma imposed on them by the teaching of Hinduism. While the nineteenth-twentieth century Indian Christian interpretation of the Bible is not very relevant to Christian Dalits in India in today's context, certain

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, p. 43.

<sup>112</sup> A. Maria Arul Raja, "Some Reflections." pp. 257-58.



elements like—the divine power of Jesus on the cross, the *kenotic* experience of Christ in the interpretation of the cry of abandonment of Jesus Christ on the cross are some of the crucial elements that can strengthen and complement an authentic Christian Dalit interpretation of the Bible particularly Psalm 22.

In both cases Psalm 22 is contextualized as per the needs of the time. While caste Christians interpreting the psalm emphasise predominantly the divine power of the cross and Christ, Dalit interpreters see the humanity of Jesus through the psalm—the suffering and rejected human Jesus. In the context of the karma doctrine, both the interpretations affirm that Christ has nullified human sins on the cross. Although the Hindu scriptures legitimize karma theory as applying to all individuals, an Indian Christian interpretation of Psalm 22 in general and Dalit Christian interpretation of Psalm 22 in particular reject such a karmic understanding of the psalm. The context of the psalm was taken to mean the context of the reader, be it high caste Indian Christian or Dalit interpretation of the psalm. By adopting a reader centred approach the meaning and performance of Psalm 22 is radically transformed in the Indian Christian context in general and Dalit Christian context in particular. The Dalit Christian interpretation of Psalm 22 is distinct in comparison with its non-Dalit interpreters. We shall return to this discussion in chapter 10 below.

## **Chapter 8**

### **‘Dalits among the Dalits’: Christian Dalit Women’s Interpretation of Psalm 22**

#### **8.0 Introduction**

In the previous chapter we discussed the details of the contextualization of Psalm 22 under the influence of Hindu doctrine of karma and scriptures. We argued that both the Hindu scriptures and the Hindu doctrine of karma played an important role in the Indian Christian interpretation of Psalm 22. We demonstrated that in the Christian interpretation of Psalm 22 the Hindu scriptural context had only an indirect influence. The Hindu doctrine of karma has been rejected by the nineteenth and twentieth century Indian Christian interpretation and the modern Dalit Christian interpretation of Psalm 22. It is made clear that Christ, through his death and resurrection, nullified the karma of human beings and stands in solidarity with oppressed individuals and community. The meaning of Psalm 22 has been radically changed when applied to the Indian Christian Dalit context.

Dalit means the broken, the oppressed. In practical terms they are the ‘untouchables’, who form 15.74% of the Indian population. The proportion of women to men is 927 to 1000 (1991 census), indicating that there are about 64 million Dalit women in India. Their very number demands the undivided attention of any social development, change or movement. The Christian Dalit woman, in addition to the many problems she faces along with other Dalit women, has to deal with the problems of class and caste discrimination within the Church. Christian Dalit women in India are very religious and the need to examine their relationship with God is required for an authentic Dalit woman’s hermeneutic. Moreover, Dalit Christian women’s experience is unique to a Dalit interpretation of a biblical text. Although they share in common the Indian interpretive context along with other Dalit Christian men, their point of view remains distinct to their experience. The meaning and performance of Psalm 22 is further transformed when the Christian Dalit women interpret it in the light of their own reading context. Dalit women as “specific reader” or “actual reader” articulate their point of view in their contemporary

application of Psalm 22. As a backdrop to our study we will explain briefly the status of women in general in India, the context of Dalit women, Christian Dalit women, and the role of the Bible in a Christian Dalit women's context.

### **8.1 The Status of Women in India**

Even from or before their birth women in India are discriminated against and marginalised. They are less educated; face more unemployment and health risks than men. The empowerment of women in India is very low. It was pointed out, with the population of one billion, there must be 512 million women in India but instead the female population was estimated at only 489 million. This means that there are 25 million 'missing women'. These missing women are either discriminated against before birth so that they are never born or they are discriminated against while alive in such a way that they are not allowed to survive.<sup>1</sup> Female mortality is higher among infants where "every sixth infant death is specifically due to sex discrimination"<sup>2</sup> and among girls under 5 years of age the death rate is 18% higher than boys. Moreover "of the 15 million baby girls born in India each year, nearly 25% will not see their 15<sup>th</sup> birthday."<sup>3</sup> In the whole of India it is estimated that only 40-50% of women receive any antenatal care. "300 Indian women die everyday during childbirth or of pregnancy-related causes ... Pregnancy-related deaths account for one-quarter of all fatalities among women aged 15 to 29."<sup>4</sup>

The situation in the area of education is no better. "The literacy rate for women is 45% compared to 68% for men. Of the 130 million 6 to 11 year-old children not in school, 60% are girls. Only 59% of primary students reach grade five. Also, only 39% of females (compared to 64% of males) above the age of 7 are literate."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Himanshu Jha and Yogesh Kumar, "The accumulated effects of inequality," 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2006; [www.socialwatch.org/en/informesNacionales/446.html](http://www.socialwatch.org/en/informesNacionales/446.html)

<sup>2</sup> Carol Coonrod, "Chronic Hunger and the Status of Women in India," June 1998; [www.thp.org/reports/indiaiwom.htm](http://www.thp.org/reports/indiaiwom.htm)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Raman Mohan, "Tales that 'missing women' tell," 4<sup>th</sup> August, 2002; [www.tribuneindia.com/2002/20020804/herworld.htm#1](http://www.tribuneindia.com/2002/20020804/herworld.htm#1)

<sup>5</sup> Jha and Kumar, "The accumulated effects of inequality."

In the area of higher institutional and decision making levels women's representation remains extremely limited. "In the **Lok Sabha** (House of the People) there are only 45 women out of 543 parliamentarians, approximately 8.3%. Out of a total of 242 **Rajya sabha** (Council of States) members, only 28 are women, a mere 11.6%."<sup>6</sup>

The above data indicates how women are discriminated against and marginalised compared with men in India. Although attempts are being made to address all the problems faced by women there is still a long way to go.

## 8.2 The Context of Dalit Women

Dalit women are discriminated against on a caste, class and gender bias. They are the Dalits among the Dalits. To show acrimony and vengeance against their men-folk, the dominant caste men abuse the women publicly, parade them naked, rape them and sometimes also kill them. The Dalit woman is thrice alienated from the resources of society owing to her gender, caste and class. Because of her gender she is subordinate to the men in family and society, discriminated against for jobs, paid less and targeted for sexual and physical abuse. Because of her caste, she is considered an untouchable, her mobility restricted, considered polluting and unclean, denied jobs, legal aid, education and an easy object of violence. Because of the class difference, her economic status is low, poor and hence she is illiterate, unskilled, unorganised, dependent, and easily exploited and abused.

The disabilities and limitations placed on Dalits in terms of education,<sup>7</sup> caste, occupation, social interaction and social mobility have resulted in their being pushed to the lowest class – so much so that caste and class are synonymous in Indian society. The Dalit woman faces the same limitations and marginalization in a more severe form. With the majority in the community already landless, there is no possibility of her owning land. The restrictions on certain types of employment, the assignment of unclean work, the lack of organizing and support networks leads to

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> The literacy rate among Dalit women is very low. According to 1991 census the literacy rate among Dalit women in Bihar was an astonishingly low 7.07% and for men it was 30.64%. In Rajasthan it was 8.31% for women and 42.38% for men. For more details on this see Vidyasagar J. Dogar, *Rural Christian Community in North West India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2001), p. 102.

further subjugation and poverty. In situations of change, women have often taken on the burden of continuing caste-based occupations and maintenance of the household. Traditional jobs are shunned by the men and hence many remain unemployed for long and the women have to support the family. The very direct and underlying supportive and reinforcing role of caste is therefore evident in Indian class structure. The impact of caste and class on Dalit women is more than the mere sum of these and even more than the impact of caste and class on Dalit men and non-Dalit women.<sup>8</sup> The three forces of gender, class, and caste act not only in isolation but also place specific limitations and produce forms of discrimination in combination.

One important source that speaks of the resilience and strength of the Dalit women is Dalit literature, which is marked by revolt because of its association with the hopes for liberation from the drudgery of the caste system. For instance Susie Tharu analysing the story of "Mother" by Baburao Bagul in *Homeless in my Land* writes,

For the widow-mother protagonist—and for the Dalit feminist—nothing comes so easily, yet there is in the story the stirring of a new kind of movement: from the never ceasing shuttle between the extraditions and death that comprise her impossible life, to a struggle to leave, and in that single act to renovate the world ... The beginnings of a movement, possibly, from untouchable-harijan to Dalit.<sup>9</sup>

The language in this literature is often provocative, describing the experiences of Dalit people struggling for survival and confronting limitations, abject poverty, misery and brutality. A Dalit poem confirms this:

We shall break the class oppression that thrives on women's labor. If we don't, we'll have to spend all our lives in useless tears. Hunger pangs drive us to toil every day. We slave all day for a handful of gruel. O, the merciless masters chase us on the one side, And our starving children wail on the other side. O, the torments of our drunken husbands on the one hand, the persecution by our creditors on the other hand, 'what is right - To live or to die?' Is the nagging question burning in our hearts. Having borne unlimited number of children, we have become victims of earth's displeasure so we'll cast our burdens upon the Lord and dare to stand up and fight for our release!<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Leela Dube, "Caste and Women," in M. N. Srinivas (ed) *Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avatar* (New Delhi: Viking/Penguin, 1996), p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Susie Tharu, "The Impossible Subject: Caste in the Scene of Desire," in Meenakshi Thapan (ed.) *Embodiment: essays on Gender and Identity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 268.

<sup>10</sup> This poem of Dalit protest was translated from Tamil by M.E. Prabhakar and published in M. E. Prabhakar (ed) *Towards A Dalit Theology* (Bangalore: CISRS, 1988), p. 168.

The literature does not reflect any established critical theory or point of view, but innate within its new thinking and a new point of view, is a movement to bring about change. The questions raised in these descriptions are frightening but full of promise.

### **8.3 The Context of the Christian Dalit Women**

The Christian Dalit woman, in addition to the many problems she faces in society and in her home, has to deal with discrimination within the Church because of her gender, her class and caste by upper-caste Christians. While Dalit women are the most regular in terms of attendance in Church and in most cases form a majority of Church members, they are not always adequately represented in any administrative bodies and are denied full participation. The androcentric theology and dogmas of the Church and its patriarchal structures continue to subjugate the Dalit woman and to justify her weak and powerless social status by reassuring her that self-sacrifice and self-denial are a woman's best virtues. Patriarchal culture and androcentric theology have contributed to her oppression by viewing her as an inferior being who must always subordinate herself to male supremacy, an inferior being who must always be treated with bias and condescension. Despite all these problems, Dalit women are the strongest in faith, in courage and perseverance, and are extremely resilient and dignified. They are hard working and are very often the primary care givers and bread winners, even in cases where the husband is present. In spite of being the most marginalized, they sustain the community and the Church.<sup>11</sup>

### **8.4 Dalit Christian Women and the Bible**

Dalit Christian women use and appropriate the Bible in their everyday life situations. For centuries Dalits were denied access to Hindu Scriptures, which sanctified and justified the hierarchal and discriminative system of caste. By being denied education they are hindered from access to traditional knowledge. Lack of access to Scripture has hindered Dalits from making a contribution to the interpretation of Scripture. The Hindu Scriptures on the whole solidify a national identity forged by the Hindu rhetoric of Brahmanical or caste supremacy. As noted in our previous chapter it is

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<sup>11</sup> For some of these details see Monica J. Melanchthon, "Gospel and Culture: A Dalit Woman's Perspective," *Voices* 19: 3, 4 (1995), pp. 20-25.



impossible to understand fully the Dalit response to the Bible without taking note of how the traditional scriptures were used by the upper caste communities against the Dalits. Accessibility to the Christian sacred Scriptures enabled them to “embrace a central religious symbol that was denied to them by Hinduism.”<sup>12</sup>

In the light of what is said above we need to look at the issue of how Christian Dalit women use the Bible for their liberation and emancipation. Indian Christian women need to be liberated from a two-fold bondage, that of patriarchal hermeneutics of the Bible on the one hand and that of the scriptures of other faiths on the other. The latter have dominated and shaped the cultural ethos and social values of the Indian community for a far longer period than the Bible. Therefore, feminist hermeneutics should bring out the hidden patriarchal assumptions of all scriptures in India. This might fulfil a larger purpose in the story of God’s liberation of both women and men in the totality of a reconciled humanity.<sup>13</sup>

With this general backdrop of the status of women, Dalit women, and Dalit Christian women, the present chapter analyses the role and function of Psalm 22 for Dalit Christian women for their Christian life within their social and Church life. This will help us to identify the distinctiveness of the interpretation of Psalm 22 by Christian Dalit women.

### **8.5 Psalm 22 and Christian Dalit Women**

Christian Dalit women are very faithful in both reading and appropriating the biblical message for their faith and day to day survival in the Indian context. They derive strong hope and strength from the Bible and at the same time they also ask certain crucial questions looking at God based on the biblical message. We understand the role of Psalm 22 in Christian Dalit women’s’ lives in the light of following issues: Deconstructing the patriarchal notions in the biblical text; caste conflicts, sexual abuse and domestic violence; the role of Hindu Scriptures; the role and meaning of lament; the meaning of the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There may be

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<sup>12</sup> Sathianathan Clarke, “Viewing the Bible.” pp. 256-57.

<sup>13</sup> For a detailed theological discussion on this and related points see, Stanley J. Samartha, “But if it is a Daughter She Shall Live,” in Aruna Gnanadason (ed) *Towards a Theology of Humanhood: Women’s Perspective* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1986), pp. 101-10.

other themes emerging from other studies relating to Dalit Christian women. Moreover, we suppose these themes emerging out of our data are very crucial for Dalit Christian women in India in their struggle and desire for change following biblical principles. By describing and developing these themes we intend to capture the role and function of Psalm 22 in the lives of the Christian Dalit women with a view to identifying their distinct interpretation of the Bible. My basic assumption in delineating these themes is that Christian Dalit women are living at the intersection of the three traditions: Indian, Dalit and Christian, which may either reinforce each other or be at odds at each other within their own being.<sup>14</sup>

8.5.1 Deconstructing the patriarchal notions in the biblical text: Although the Christian Dalit women in the past were not fully aware of rereading the Bible based on their own perspective and reading against the patriarchal bias of the text. Certain theologically trained women have introduced this method in the Church and there are indirect clues derived in women's preaching and Bible study in this regard. Now women are more aware of reading the biblical texts with a hermeneutics of suspicion since they are given to them with clear male bias. These readings are carried out by Christian Dalit women in the church with the guidance provided by theologically trained women.

Dalit Christian women share their personal stories of agony and distress when they gather together for a weekly Bible study and prayer meetings. This takes place very often in the form of personal testimonies. In a women's group meeting during the group discussion<sup>15</sup> three different women share their experiences and their testimonies.<sup>16</sup> These testimonies are based on their perception that God was present in their struggle to face oppression and how Psalm 22 functions as a source of their salvation in times of their distress. In all three testimonies the women acknowledge the fact that they are ill treated, physically tortured and sexually abused as Dalit

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<sup>14</sup> John C. B. Webster et.al. *From Role to Identity: Dalit Christian Women in Transition* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> For details see Commentary 5 – November 5, 2004.

<sup>16</sup> This group prefer to call their personal sharing as testimony. It is a normal practice to share all their personal experiences and problems with the members of women's prayer groups in the form of

women. Psalm 22 is their source of comfort and solace in these adverse situations. The biblical text becomes a central focus in their personal sharing.

In the absence of a large literate mass among Dalit women and in the group mentioned above, sophisticated and complex methods of biblical interpretation could prove to be a challenge. The group mentioned above is a combination of literate, semi-literate and illiterate women. For such gatherings the use of imaginative, informal learning strategies is a great need. These non-formal methods, called 'vernacular readings' by Sugirtharajah, are characteristic of local culture and communication process and are distinguished from 'metropolitan readings' that assume a 'working universality'.<sup>17</sup> Ranjini Rebera highlights the importance and success of one such vernacular reading—'storytelling'—as a method of interpreting the biblical text in South Asia. She claims that the use of traditional story telling techniques, together with the hermeneutic of suspicion, enables women to release themselves from an androcentric interpretative process. It is in the last stage of being able creatively to identify with the women in the biblical story (or the metaphorical nature of women's struggles) by placing them side by side with their own experiences and identities that participants in such study have achieved the greatest degree of inspiration and learning.<sup>18</sup>

In the act of sharing stories told personally, consciously, and critically women begin to understand themselves and their reality better. From the depths of women's stories of joys and sorrows, triumphs and defeat, we can draw a tapestry of theological exploration and biblical interpretation which is contextual and is based on a community in struggle for humanhood. The group mentioned above are sharing their very own personal stories and are capturing the authentic Dalit women's experience. By their critical and suspicious reading of the Psalm 22 they are able to relate their

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testimonies. This will enable the members to comfort each other by praying for one another and also provide them counselling and guidance with the help of biblical message.

<sup>17</sup> R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Introduction and Some Thoughts on Asian Biblical Hermeneutics," *BibInt* 2 (1994), pp. 251-63.

<sup>18</sup> Ranjini Rebera, "Polarity or Partnership? Retelling the Story of Martha and Mary from Asian Women's Perspective (Luke 10:38-42)," *Semeia* 78 (1997), pp. 93-107.

personal life situation with the biblical text.<sup>19</sup> Let us dwell on some examples to illustrate our point.

The women in some Indian Churches are not allowed to take part in the Holy Communion services on the particular days of their menstrual cycle even if they attend the Church service.<sup>20</sup> This is painfully expressed by a male Dalit preacher in his sermon addressed to Dalit men and women on Psalm 22 as follows:

Dalit women are not allowed to enter into the temples and even in Church altars on the days of their menstruation. In the holy communion services in many places women are served the bread and wine only after the men. In several places Dalits are given separate communion cups in the name of impurity. Needless to say this discrimination continues in the day to day life of Dalits in rural and urban areas. Even in such situations Dalits are forced to ask the question the psalmist asked God: 'why have you forsaken me?'<sup>21</sup>

In one Commentary group in a Christian Dalit women's gathering, this question is discussed in brief. Women in such a context are considered impure. In some Churches it is a normal practice that women are served communion only after the men are served. In such a situation Dalit Christian women ask the same question as raised by the psalmist in Psalm 22:1: "O God my Lord why have you abandoned me?" Here these women regard the words in Psalm 22:1 with more suspicion and it comes as cry in their desperate condition.<sup>22</sup>

In their own critical way the women in Text 5 express doubts on the traditional interpretation of the text (Psalm 22) that the women are inferior and impure. The woman preacher here affirms:

We, the Dalit Christian women are said to be inferior and at times impure in our Church as well. But when we see this psalm and its content we are not. Only others treat us inferior but not God. God identified with our dalitness in all respects in this psalm.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Some of the recent publications by Christian Dalit and non-Dalit women in India have used the method of storytelling. The real-life experience of a woman or community is narrated and then related to a biblical text to enhance the meaning of the biblical text. Two such publications are worth mentioning here. Rini Ralte et.al. (eds.) *Envisioning a New Heaven and a New Earth* (New Delhi NCCI/ISPCK, 1998); Elizabeth Joy (ed) *Lived Realities: Faith Reflections on Gender Justice* (Bangalore: CISRS, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> There is no formal or legal restriction to this. But it is traditionally practised by the women due to the expectations by their male counterparts. However this practice is gradually disappearing.

<sup>21</sup> Text 7 – November 21, 2004.

<sup>22</sup> Points discussed in Commentary 4 – November 4, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Text 5 – November 5, 2004.

At the same time the above preacher affirms that God would lift them up from their present condition.

God takes the side of the poor and Dalits like us otherwise considered to be marginal people in this world. God raises Dalit women like us from the dust and from the ash heap (1 Samuel 2:8).<sup>24</sup>

In another context preaching on Psalm 22 the Dalit preacher points out that the pain and ill treatment experienced by the psalmist is comparable to Dalit women's situation in India. The preacher explains his point of view with the help of a Dalit focused Telugu film. The preacher's words are as follows:

We are rejected ones and a despised community. We only look at the Bible in our distressing situation. The psalmist in verse 11 talks about his suffering and feels that no one is helping him in his distress. Real painful situation is clearly mentioned here. In a recent Telugu film called *Osey Raamulamma*<sup>25</sup> (a vulgar call to a Dalit lady named Raamulamma by a dominant caste man). We see how Dalits are expected to be under the sandals of upper caste people. They are considered and treated like worms. The same expression is seen in verse 6 of this psalm.<sup>26</sup>

In both these contexts the Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22 is doing something very important perhaps not otherwise done by preachers in the normal course of events. It is generally identified in Psalm 22 that all the pain and suffering is related to Dalits in general and women's experience is taken for granted. The biblical passages are said to be addressing the problems of Dalits but without any specific reference to the Dalit women's issues. The above evidence reveals that women look at the Bible with their experience in particular.

In some other cases the daily struggle of a woman lead her to express her cry of anguish based on Psalm 22. In this case the cry is more vivid. The Dalit woman reads the text with critical suspicion based on her own distressed situation.

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> This is a Telugu language film released in the year 1997. The film portrays the bondage of Dalit women under the dominant caste men in Andhra Pradesh. Eventually the Dalit woman Raamulamma prevails against all the odds and hardship created by the dominant caste men in her society.

<sup>26</sup> Text 9 – November 28, 2004.

Reflection 1<sup>27</sup>: Psalm 22 is a psalm of David in his distress. I want to raise along with the psalmist the following questions: Where are you, God? Why don't you help me? Why have you abandoned me? Why have you 'betrayed' me? There is no guarantee of your security in my life. My husband died two years ago, and I am left at the mercy of my children. They too have left me without proper care. I am like a worm, used and thrown out, not useful to any one. I cry unto you and my lamentation is always before you. I want to die, yet it is not an easy solution. My misery and suffering is continually before me. Day and night I shed tears in your presence, yet I find no solution to all my problems. I feel like being silent because I am exhausted physically. I am helpless and frustrated in my present condition.

In all the above examples it is clear that the critical view of reading the psalm by the women in their own way put them in a strong relationship with a biblical text like Psalm 22. Dalit Christian women find resonance with their situation in reading Psalm 22 with critical suspicion. By relating their personal experience with the biblical text the women are aware that the biblical message is related to their struggle and it helps them to affirm the equal status otherwise denied to them by the male centred interpretation of the biblical text. In one specific case in the context of reading Psalm 22 Christian Dalit women realise that the male propagated idea of restricting her from taking part in the Holy Communion on the days of her menstrual cycle is entirely false and they find God's solidarity with them in their situation. Dalit Christian women have appropriated the plight of the psalmist in Psalm 22 directly to their own and their family struggles to survive with a measure of dignity in the face of suffering and adversity. Their critical and suspicious reading of the psalm brought the conviction that the God they encounter and worship is the God of all people—female as well as male Dalits. The particular hope in this God means that he will raise the women from their marginal status and he will raise them from the dust and from ash heap (1Samuel 2:8).<sup>28</sup>

#### 8.5.2 Caste conflicts, abandonment, sexual abuse and domestic violence: Dalit

Christian women are subjected to many incidents of caste conflicts resulting in their sexual abuse and violence. The women become an easy target and prey in all the cases of caste assaults carried out on Dalits. In many caste conflicts Dalit women are

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<sup>27</sup> Reflection 1 is part of two short reflections from the Text and Commentary 10 – November 28, 2004.

<sup>28</sup> John Webster argues for the similar situation of Christian Dalit women in rural and urban Tamilnadu. For more details on this and related points see Webster et.al. *From Role to Identity*, p. 107. Cf. Text 5 – November 5, 2004.



the first victims. Dalit women's sexual abuse and violence must be viewed in the light of the over all caste conflicts. The words of Bhagwan Das are illuminating on this: "In all cases of caste conflicts, a Dalit woman is the first victim. In order to terrorise the whole caste, upper caste men very often with the connivance of police, rape, even gang-rape Dalit women... they (Dalit women) are exposed to much sexual harassment and exploitation."<sup>29</sup> In Andhra Pradesh, and in other states as well, young Dalit women are the real target of caste people. Many young girls from Dalit background are sexually harassed by the caste people. Even when there are strict laws against such atrocities, in reality these are not enforced.<sup>30</sup> Even though several laws are available to punish offenders who have abused and violated Dalit women no one is really interested in enforcing them.<sup>31</sup>

Dalit women are not respected and, are at times, accused of immorality and sexually abused by the upper caste landlords and estate owners. This has been confirmed by Dalit Christian women in Kolar Gold Fields in Karnataka, South India. The cry of another Christian Dalit woman is on the similar lines:

Dalit women go through similar experiences of alienation, humiliation, and insult all through their life in this world. We already know how the Dalit women are treated in the incidence of suicides of several farmers in Andhra Pradesh. This is one such example of our suffering in this world.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Bhagwan Das, "Socio-Economic Problems of Dalits," in Bhagwan Das and James Massey (eds.) *Dalit Solidarity* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1995), p. 74.

<sup>30</sup> For example, in Karamchedu village in Prakasham district of Andhra Pradesh on July 17, 1985 several Dalit young and middle aged women were raped and gang raped by the caste people. The khamma caste people assaulted all the Dalit women of this village and eventually killed them. In another incident on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1989, in Tangutur of Prakasham district, a Dalit young woman of 18 years was raped and burnt alive by a caste man of political influence. These are only two among a host of cases reported and hundreds of unreported cases of sexual violence against young Dalit women in Andhra Pradesh.

<sup>31</sup> Laws are available to punish those who assault women. These laws relate to Sati, Dowry, Maternity benefits, Immoral trafficking, Medical Termination of Pregnancy, Child Marriage, Minimum Wages, Bonded labour, Rape laws etc. The National Commission for Women act 1990 clearly describe the goals and objectives of this organisation to protect and promote the interest and safeguard the rights of women. This organisation receives complaints regularly. For example, the complaint cell between January-December 2001, received a total of 4592 complaints of women's problems include the following: Dowry death: 339; Murder: 144; Rape: 154; Molestation: 43; Dowry harassment: 714; Sexual harassment: 47; Bigamy: 47; Desertion of wives: 946 and other types of harassment: 2158. Out of these figures nearly 60% of the complaints are related to Dalit women. For more details on this see <http://ncw.nic.in/lswindex.htm>

<sup>32</sup> Text 5 – November 5, 2004.

In the above quotation from a sermon on Psalm 22 the Dalit Christian woman explains why the Dalit women in the farmer's suicide are of particular attention. Many Dalit farmers' suicide cases are related to their poverty. Along with this problem, Dalit women farmers (the wives of those Dalit farmers who committed suicide) are sexually abused and physically tortured by the dominant caste landlords. In the view of the dominant caste landlords Dalit women are mere objects of their sexual gratification. Elsewhere we pointed out that Dalit women are considered to be immoral by the dominant caste men. Dalit women are being raped because in the opinion of the upper caste society, "they have no morals and they deserve it."<sup>33</sup> Women from the lower castes are considered "so lowly and degraded in life that their body was a free terrain of colonisation."<sup>34</sup>

Dalit women are not allowed to marry upper caste men and if they fall in love with upper caste men they are severely punished because of the view that the low caste blood of a woman may cause impurity to an upper caste man's lineage. The experience of a Dalit woman student in her reflection on Psalm 22 confirms this fact:

The rejection experience of the psalmist can be seen among Dalit women in India. When I was working as a probationer in a village called Mangattucheri in Tamilnadu, South India, a Dalit girl loved a dominant caste boy. When dominant caste people noticed it they excommunicated the girl and assigned her all menial job undertaking in the houses of dominant caste people as a punishment. If she refuses to do these jobs, no food or water will be given to her. Even though the boy was responsible in enticing the girl only the girl is punished because she is from Dalit caste.<sup>35</sup>

In some cases the Dalit girls are even raped and killed if they develop any affair with upper caste men. In some cases even after their marriage, Dalit girls are subjected to severe physical torture and brutal killing. We can illustrate this point with a real life example: On 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2004, in a village called Vadambedu in Tada mandal near Nellore district, a Dalit young girl's womb was opened and the foetus was killed by

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<sup>33</sup> Kumud Pawde, "The Position of Dalit Women in Indian Society," in Bhagwan Das and James Massey (eds.) *Dalit Solidarity*, p. 145.

<sup>34</sup> Vidyut Bhagwat, "Dalit Women in India: Issues and Perspectives – Some Critical Reflections," in P. G. Jogdand (ed) *Dalit Women in India: Issues and Perspectives* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1995), p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> These words are from Reflection 7 of Text 8 – November 25, 2004.

the dominant caste people because she was pregnant with the child of a dominant caste boy. She was physically tortured prior to her death.<sup>36</sup>

Nur Yalman links the sexual purity of women with the purity of caste, suggesting that female sexuality presents a threat because of the danger of her introducing impure or low caste blood into the lineage. The common belief is that it is through women (and not men) that the 'purity' of caste-community is ensured and preserved. The danger of low quality blood entering their caste only exists with women. The male seed they receive should be the best available.<sup>37</sup>

At the same time the dominant caste men are known for sexually abusing Dalit women in the name of caste conflicts. The dominant caste men not only treat Dalit women as morally degenerate but consider them as mere objects of their lust. In some cases the dominant caste men use Dalit women for sexual intercourse under the pretext of a sure cure for some diseases like syphilis.<sup>38</sup>

Dalit women widows are subjected to more harsh treatment in Indian society than other women. A Dalit Christian widow faces two fold alienation and discrimination. First, she faces alienation and isolation from the very house she lives. Second, she faces discrimination in her Church and society. The cry of this Dalit widow expresses the feeling of Dalit widows that they are unwanted by their family and society. She cries:

My husband died two years ago, and I am left at the mercy of my children. They too have left me without proper care. I am like a worm, used and thrown out, not useful to any one.<sup>39</sup>

Although these kinds of problems are common with any poor women in Indian society, Dalit women are more prone to these problems than other dominant caste women. Dalits widows are ill treated and made to beg in the streets. They are

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<sup>36</sup> This incident was reported on July 14, 2004 in *Eenaadu* (Chennai Edition).

<sup>37</sup> Nur Yalman, "On the Purity of Women in the Castes of Ceylon and Malabar," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 93 (1968), pp. 25-58.

<sup>38</sup> Bhagwan Das, "Socio-Economic Problems of Dalits." p. 74.

<sup>39</sup> Reflection 1 in the Text and Commentary 10 – November 28, 2004. See note 28 for the full quotation. Part of the quotation is repeated here for a different emphasis.

tortured and beaten to death.<sup>40</sup> They are not covered by any religious and state benefit scheme as in the case of dominant caste widows. They are not only driven out of their homes but out of the society and out of their Churches. Although the words from the reflection quoted above are from a Christian Dalit widow, all widows are looked on as unlucky by the married men and women particularly if they meet them face to face on their way to some important work. The widow women, if they are Dalits, face more discrimination than others.

Many Dalit women are deserted by their husbands. This is also common among all women.<sup>41</sup> But in the case of Dalit women it is more common than other dominant caste women.<sup>42</sup> Dalit women face sexual abuse and other related problems because of their vulnerable situation. They are also subjected to severe mental, psychological and physical stress. They are also subjected to poverty, chronic sickness including mental illness, disability and eventually widowhood.<sup>43</sup> The words of one Dalit woman abandoned by her husband captures the same point:

My husband abandoned me 22 years ago. This caused more distress in my life as I was mocked by my friends and relatives. Several men tried to make filthy comments and attempted to molest me. I had to bear the pain and suffering along with my daughter and son. I even attempted suicide due to my social alienation and physical illness. I had to go through the problems related to menopause in this age. I thought of taking my own life due to all my social, psychological and physical problems.<sup>44</sup>

In several cases like the situation of a woman in the above mentioned reflection, the Dalit women are abandoned by the high caste men after marrying them, in some

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<sup>40</sup> In Bihar in Gaandi village in Angara block, on 13<sup>th</sup> September, 2000, two Dalit widows were severely beaten and tortured as they were branded as witches by the dominant caste people in their own village. When some of their family members supported them they too were beaten. One of the Dalit widows Jeetan Devi was eventually killed after undergoing torture for three days. (Source: *Indian Express*, September 14, 2000 Mumbai edition).

<sup>41</sup> For instance U. N. Jindal and A. N. Gupta conducted research on 200 female partners who attend their infertility clinic in Haryana, Punjab, India. Their findings revealed nearly 53% faced abandonment due to childlessness. For details see *International Journal of Fertility* 34: 1 (1989), pp. 30-33.

<sup>42</sup> For details of this discussion see Bhagwan Das, "Socio-Economic Problems of Dalits." pp. 74-75.

<sup>43</sup> Barbara Harriss –White, "State, Market, Collective and Household Action in India's Social Sector," in Barbara Harriss – White and S. Subramanian (eds.) *Illfare in India – Essays on Indian Social Sector in honour of S. Guhan* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999), pp. 303-28.

<sup>44</sup> Reflection 2 in the Text and Commentary 10 – November 28, 2004.

cases with children.<sup>45</sup> In such cases the women are left with both the additional burden of child rearing and the stigma.

Domestic violence is very common among all women in Indian society. Most often it is not brought to light as millions of women suffer quietly at the hands of violent men. Estheramma reports that her husband used to get drunk and beat her for no reason. This caused a lot of physical pain and mental stress in her daily life. Several of her relatives used to mock and laugh at her situation.<sup>46</sup> Millions of Dalit women live in an atmosphere of constant violence in their homes in the hands of drunken husbands and sometimes other members of the family, yet, they often single handedly slave at home and in the fields to keep their children from hunger.<sup>47</sup>

Men battering women is a common situation not only among the Dalit women and other caste women in general. Men take absolute precedence over their wives in Indian society. Men take decisions, they take the money, and they eat first, and women's concerns are not taken into consideration. Although Dalits today do not take part in Sanskritization they nevertheless have adopted many traditions from the upper castes. Dalits have taken over the idea from their Hindu neighbours that the husband is like a god and his wife should treat him with due respect. Many women fast for the well being of their husbands. As already pointed out in chapter 6 above Dalit women like Mahar women perform special vows to gods in order that they be granted marriage to the same husbands seven times.<sup>48</sup> It is because of this problem that many women including the Dalit women remain passive and endure their suffering. Some Dalit women along with others think that it is the right of her husband to batter her.

To summarize, in any caste conflict against Dalits the women are the first and worst victims. Laws against those who offend women in this regard are not implemented in most cases. Sexual abuse and violence against Dalit women is very common. Dalit

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<sup>45</sup> An example of Sudha Surendran, a Dalit girl aged 22 years was abandoned by her dominant caste man after having two children. (Source: *ONE* 31: 1, 2005).

<sup>46</sup> Testimony 1 from the Commentary 5 – November 5, 2004.

<sup>47</sup> Aruna Gnanadason, "Dalit Women – The Dalit of the Dalit," in Arvind P. Nirmal (ed) *Towards A Common Dalit Ideology*, pp. 109-120.

women are considered morally degenerate by the high caste men. The rapes and sexual abuse against them are justified as something they deserve. Dalit women are accused of introducing low caste and impure blood in to the dominant and upper caste lineage. Thus they are severely punished and killed if they plan to marry the upper caste men. By reading and appropriating Psalm 22 the Christian Dalit women who face violence and sexual abuse have expressed a sense of comfort and hope that God is in solidarity with them in their distress. The women who are deserted by their husbands find that the situation of the psalmist is no different to theirs. Dalit Christian women see that the experience of being despised and rejected voiced in the psalm finds a 'perfect' resonance with theirs.

8.5.3 The Role of Hindu Scriptures in the oppression of Dalit women: As already discussed in chapter 6 the Hindu Scriptures ('shastras' or the instructional treatises dating back to third century B. C.) legitimize the caste system. In these treatises women have been equated to the lower castes and definite restrictions have been placed on both.<sup>49</sup> Both have been defined as impure, of sinful birth and as having a polluting presence. These treatises not only legitimize the structures of patriarchy but also the very organization of caste.<sup>50</sup>

Reflecting on Psalm 22 a Dalit Christian woman student shares her agony over the Dalit women oppression by the caste Hindus justified by Hindu Scriptures.

The Sanskrit term *dal* from which the word Dalit come meaning broken, crushed, asunder and oppressed and they are in fact treated by the caste people in a similar way. The *Rig Veda* addressed Dalits as *anaso* and the word *anas* means fallen and hopeless. This remark indicated that the Dalits are not even worthy to be treated as human beings. In the two great epics of India, *Ramayana* and *Mhabharatha* those who kill the Dalits are considered as heroes. Thus the Hindus who follow Vedas and epic stories thought that Dalits are born to be oppressed.<sup>51</sup>

Although some of the verses concerning women in Rig Veda are related to all the women regardless of their caste, these verses in Rig Veda (for example, "The nature

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<sup>48</sup> See note 25 in Chapter 6 above.

<sup>49</sup> Sharmila Rege, "Caste and Gender: The Violence against Women in India," in P. G. Jogdand (ed) *Dalit Women in India*, pp. 18-36.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Reflection 4 from the Text 8 – November 25, 2004.



of women is like that of the hyena.”)<sup>52</sup> are particularly imposed on low caste and Dalit women. This can be exemplified with the imposition of Sati on Dalit women by Brahmins. Two texts are quoted by them to legitimize this act. First, from Brahma Purana: “It is the highest duty of the women to immolate herself after her husband.”<sup>53</sup> Second, from Rig Veda: “Let These women, whose husbands are worthy and are living, enter the house with ghee (applied) as corrylium (to their eyes). Let these wives first step into the pyre, tearless without any affliction and well adorned.”<sup>54</sup> As a law Sati is totally abolished in India today. But several reported and unreported incidents of this cruelty continue to occur in the lives of Dalit women with the strong support from the dominant caste Hindus.<sup>55</sup>

The control on women’s sexuality in particular was essential for the development of a patriarchal caste hierarchy, both for the maintenance of caste and for the legitimation and control of inheritance. This is clearly seen in the age of Smiritis (around 500-300 B.C.), when Manu, the lawgiver, laid down his code, the position of women declined further. Manu’s code clearly stated that, “A woman should never be independent. Her father has authority over her in childhood, her husband in youth, and her son in old age.”<sup>56</sup> When caste became pronounced woman’s ‘lust’ for men had to be firmly controlled. The Brahmanical ideal of the ‘Pativrata’ (husband worshipper) was emphasized.<sup>57</sup> Although women of all caste groups experienced this ‘dalitness’, it was women of all the lowest caste and outcaste groups experienced the burden of patriarchal repression both in the hands of the upper castes and in the hands of men.

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<sup>52</sup> Rig Veda X.95.10.

<sup>53</sup> Brahma Purana 80.75.

<sup>54</sup> Rig Veda X.18.7.

<sup>55</sup> On November 11, 1999, Charan Shaw, a 55 year Dalit woman was forced to accept Sati after the death of her husband Man Shaw in Bundelkhand village in North India. The upper caste Hindu Brahmins were behind this event. For details on this issue see Rani Sengupta, “Shocking Sati in Bundelkhand,” in <http://www.dalistan.org/journal/politics/psec/mahosati.html>

<sup>56</sup> Manu Smiriti V.148 cited in Aruna Gnanadason, “Dalit Women—The Dalit of the Dalit.” In James Massey (ed) *Indigenous People*, p. 173.

<sup>57</sup> Aruna Gnanadason, “Dalit Women—The Dalit of the Dalit.” in Arvind P. Nirmal (ed) *Towards A Common Dalit Ideology*, pp. 109-120.

The Christian Dalit woman student mentioned above in relation to her reflection on Psalm 22 thinks that even on the basis of Hindu Scriptures Dalit women are oppressed by caste Hindus. In such a situation she can identify with the suffering and oppression mentioned in Psalm 22. She reflects,

So all the ill treatment meted out to the psalmist in the psalm is comparable to the Dalit situation and at the same time like the psalmist Dalits can only look unto God for their liberation.<sup>58</sup>

From the above discussion it is clear that the Dalit women's oppression is based on certain Hindu Scriptures. Christian Dalit women are part of this Hindu oppression. They can now look at Psalm 22 as a source of liberation from such religious oppression along with the other streams of resistance against patriarchal Brahmanism within the later Hindu religious tradition.<sup>59</sup>

8.5.4 The Role and meaning of Lament for Dalit Christian women: Based on Psalm 22 Dalit Christian women reflect on the theme of lament in different ways relating to their daily life situation. They believe that the psalms of lament found in the Psalter are the faith responses of the people of Israel when there is trouble, disturbance, risk, distress, calamity, sickness, disaster etc that may threaten the very existence of their life. This is what gives Christian Dalit women hope. They look on the psalms of lament as a religious resource which addresses their present predicament. Dalit Christian women's tangible expression of their daily life situation in the lament Psalm 22 can be categorised under three major sub themes.

8.5.4.1 Lament as Protest: Although many Christian Dalit women reflecting on Psalm 22 do not mean protest in terms of negative anger against God, nevertheless they mean that it is directed against the system and their oppressor and they mean it as a genuine expression of their problem before their deliverer, God. As described in this chapter in a subsection on the reading of the psalm with critical suspicion, a Dalit pastor on the basis of his reflection of Psalm 22 invites the Christian Dalit

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<sup>58</sup> Reflection 4 from the Text 8 – November 25, 2004.

<sup>59</sup> Resurgence of mother goddess and fertility cults in the Shakti cult, the Bhakti cult (a strong non-Aryan southern movement, brought in anti-caste, anti-patriarchy challenges to Hinduism) are some of the anti-caste movements developed and became popular in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. in Hinduism.

women in his Church to react strongly to this oppression. He invites Dalit women to view the 'oppressive theory' propagated by the upper caste people as a false construct. His words on the reflection of Psalm 22 are also viewed with the critical suspicion of the text and at the same time as an expression of protest against the oppressive structures.<sup>60</sup>

A portion of the text can be quoted again for the above emphasis:

In a recent Telugu film called *Osey Raamulamma* (Hey Raamulamma, a rude way of calling of a dominant caste man to a Dalit lady named Raamulamma). We see how Dalits are expected to be under the sandals of upper caste people. They are considered and treated like a worm. Same expression is seen in verse 6 of this psalm.<sup>61</sup>

The analysis of Walter Brueggemann on laments may be helpful at this point. Brueggemann proposes that there are four specific things happening in the social function of the laments: (i) things are not right in the present arrangement; (ii) they need not stay this way and can be changed; (iii) the speaker will not accept them in this way, for the present arrangement is intolerable; (iv) it is God's obligation to change things.<sup>62</sup>

The Dalit Christian is community subjected to severe oppression because of the popular view that they are called to suffer in this world by their birth in a low caste. In traditional interpretations of the Psalm 22 in verse 6 the word 'worm' may have been taken to mean that Dalit women are like a worm destined to suffer under the hands of oppressors. Now the preacher recognises that the 'oppressive theory' interpretation can't be accepted to rule over Dalit women and thus like *Raamulamma* in the film, calls all Christian Dalit women in his congregation, to resist and protest against all the forces responsible for their oppression in their present condition which is intolerable. At the same time the preacher is of the firm belief that only God can change (maybe it is God's obligation) the present situation. The preacher expresses this point in the following words:

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<sup>60</sup> Text 9 – November 28, 2004.

<sup>61</sup> Text 9 – November 28, 2004.

<sup>62</sup> Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the life of Faith*, p. 105.

In our pain we are comforted and given victory, in our death like situation we are given life through the resurrection power of Jesus Christ ... God's deliverance is possible from all oppressions in our life, from all our bondage experience Christ's deliverance comes, the oppressed people will be delivered by God himself, based on Revelation 22<sup>nd</sup> chapter we are given great hope and we shall have the experience of God's revelation.<sup>63</sup>

Thus the lament of the psalmist empowers Dalit women to express their cry of protest against the unjust social structure that oppresses them. At the same time they firmly believe that God will deliver them from their present oppression.<sup>64</sup>

8.5.4.2 *Lament as dereliction*: The cry of dereliction in Psalm 22 is something that gives a tremendous hope and power for Dalit Christian women when they identify their situation with that of the psalmist in the psalm. One of the Dalit reflections on Psalm 22 recalls that the cry of the psalmist's abandonment is the same as the cry of Christian Dalit men and women in their present crisis. The words of the preacher confirm this:

The first two verses of the psalm describe the agonizing moments of David. He cries unto God when he was in deep distress. This cry is similar to our cry as Dalit men and women in our agonising moments. Dalit Christian men and women like us always cry like this to our God when we feel that we are totally abandoned by God in our present suffering. We cry to God when we feel that no one is having any regard for us as Christians in this world.<sup>65</sup>

The cry of the preacher quoted above can be compared with that of the psalmist's as it recalls the general situation of Dalit women and men oppressed by their enemies and their feeling that God may have abandoned them.

It is argued that the frustration of divine abandonment found in the opening verses of the psalm is somehow overcome by the psalmist in verses 3-5 when he affirms that his ancestors trusted in the liberating power of Yahweh. Indeed Yahweh liberated the ancestors of the psalmist from their affliction in the past. As already pointed out in chapter 2 it can be argued that the real function of this past reference to Yahweh's liberating activity is not to really portray Yahweh as the God of liberation at the

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<sup>63</sup> Text 9 – November 28, 2004.

<sup>64</sup> For a similar experience of Christian women from South Africa see Denise M. Ackermann, " 'A voice was heard in Ramah' : a feminist theology of praxis for healing in South Africa," in Denise M. Ackermann and Riet Bons-Storm (eds.), *Liberating Faith Practices: Feminist Practical Theologies in Context* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), pp. 75-102.

<sup>65</sup> Text 4 – November 4, 2004.

present situation; rather it serves as an accusation of divine abandonment already mentioned in v.2. It looks rather ironic on the one hand that God is enthroned as a Holy One and on the other hand the psalmist experiences a total abandonment. A Dalit woman's reflection on Psalm 22 points out the same fact of divine abandonment and irony when she cries:

I want to raise along with the psalmist the following questions: Where are you God? Why don't you help me? Why have you abandoned me? Why have you 'betrayed' me? There is no guarantee of your security in my life. You have saved your people in the past but there is no such guarantee for me at the present... Day and night I shed tears in your presence, yet I find no solution to all my problems. I feel like being silent because I am exhausted physically. I am helpless and frustrated in my present condition.<sup>66</sup>

In the case of another Dalit woman the divine abandonment is very clear as she shares her daily life struggle. Mathamma was physically tortured and sexually abused by her landlord who employed her from her teen age years. She attempted to commit suicide several times because of her vulnerable condition. She feels that God may have abandoned her in the midst of all her present misery and helplessness. She feels this sense of abandonment just as the psalmist felt and cried unto God in Psalm 22. Jesus Christ too felt the same on the Cross and he cried unto God. Now she feels that she is not alone in her cry of dereliction.<sup>67</sup>

When things go contrary to the normal expectation, the Christian Dalit women feel that they are not secure in this world. Having looked to God in the midst of their acute misery and pain they feel that God has abandoned them and thus they cry to him using the lament theme in Psalm 22. Sometimes this sense of dereliction by Dalit Christian women takes the form of an outwardly expressed loud cry during the prayers.<sup>68</sup> They also say that in and through their God forsaken experience they see

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<sup>66</sup> Reflection 1 from the Text and Commentary 10 – November 28, 2004. Elaborate text was already quoted in 7.5.1

<sup>67</sup> Testimony 2 from the Commentary 5 – November 5, 2004.

<sup>68</sup> It is normal tendency that women cry while praying in prayer meetings. But the situation in the case of many Dalit women who cry in the prayer meetings is not an artificial cry but a genuine cry based on the reflection of Psalm 22. The members in the group are asked to read the psalm quietly and meditate for a while and then personal prayers are started before the actual sermon. Thus all the women present pray with Psalm 22 in their mind. The women also cry on specific days like Good Friday when sermons are preached and the Bible verses are read relating to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

how Jesus Christ is with them since he has gone through the Gethsemane experience which is clearly reflected in Psalm 22.<sup>69</sup>

8.5.4.3 *Lament as Solace*: Many Christian Dalit women read Psalm 22 for comfort and solace in their misery and hopeless situation. They express the strong feeling that by reading the psalm they are greatly comforted and consoled. Even if they do not find immediate answers to all their problems they are assured of comfort, satisfaction and a sense of identity in their present crisis. The words of one Dalit woman emphasize the same point:

In Psalm 22:6 the psalmist experiences insult, mockery and so on. Similar experiences can be noticed in the life of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Dalit women go through similar experiences of alienation, humiliation, and insult all through their life in this world ... But we have Christ as an example, who suffered before us. Just as the psalmist feels like a worm Christ too feels dejected and frustrated on the Cross because he is considered like a worm. On the one hand we can see the rejection experience of the psalmist in these words and on the other hand the psalmist praises God because he formed him in his mother's womb. Such is the experience of all the Christian Dalit women in this world. We may be suffering in this world but we need to praise God because he formed us in our mother's womb and he has a definite purpose for each one of us ... Other places in the Bible we can find such comforting verses (Pss 72:12; 113:7-8; Isa 49:7) of God's mighty acts of liberation of the needy and the poor Dalit women like us. God is all powerful and his name is above all other names (Phili 2:9-11) and that is why we have a strong comfort and hope that he will deliver us from all our present trouble.<sup>70</sup>

In the above quotation we can see the preacher's firm belief that God comforts Dalit women as they read and appropriate the words of the psalmist and other parallel biblical portions.

In all the three testimonies in Commentary 5 Dalit Christian women express their feeling that Psalm 22 is the source of their comfort in their present crises situations. They all express their inner satisfaction and firm belief that this psalm brings solace to their lives. The same is expressed by a Hindu Dalit convert to Christianity in her words of reflection on Psalm 22 as her personal testimony:

I am from Hindu Dalit background ... I came to the knowledge of Jesus Christ through a lady friend ... All my relatives mocked at me by saying that I have joined in an unclean religion. Socially we are alienated and excluded by all our relatives. When I read Psalm 22 in my

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<sup>69</sup> This point was discussed in Commentary 5 – November 5, 2004. See above in chapter 4 for an explanation of the psalm in relation to the Gethsemane experience of Christ in Early Church Father Theodoret of Cyrus.

<sup>70</sup> Text 5 – November 5, 2004.



situation it is so comforting and I am sure that God is sustaining me and I shall always praise him for his deliverance.<sup>71</sup>

In the midst of the gloomy situation in their lives, many Dalit women express a strong sense of comfort and solace while reading and reflecting on lament psalms like Psalm 22. The words of a Dalit woman capture this point.

In spite of this bleak situation, as a Dalit woman, oppressed by my society, Church and the family, I see a dramatic turn in my life. As in the psalm grief is changed to jubilation. God saved the lamenter, sufferer, who, in his great excitement, tells others about it, his own fortune. I can sing along with the psalmist that I am not left at the death cry of Sheol by God, but I can experience the song of redemptive suffering.<sup>72</sup>

Commenting on the elements of lament in Psalm 22 Nicholas Wolterstorff argues that in any full-fledged lament an element of 'yet' is present as an expression of the endurance of faith. This 'yet' may be retrospective but also prospective. It may not only refer to what God had done in the past but it may refer to what God will do in the future (Psalm 22: 3-5, 9-11). Wolterstorff argues further that the psalmist was able to praise God because he was sure of God's comfort and solace since he will be victorious in the struggle against all that frustrates his desire. Moreover, the psalmist's 'yet' of enduring faith is deeply rooted in the sovereignty of a God who will be able to deliver the lamenter from anything awry with respect to God's will.<sup>73</sup>

To conclude, Dalit Christian women find in lament a vital religious resource to articulate their distress and look forward in hope. Protest is one such element of the lament creating a genuine dialogue between them and God. They firmly believe that in and through this protest, God will bring a desirable change in their lives. Moreover protest against unjust structures is an indication that Dalit women will not always internalize their oppressive conditions. The cry of dereliction of the psalmist is again very helpful in the lives of Dalit women as they see their own cry in it. Jesus' experience of abandonment expresses solidarity in their present experience. The solace dimension of lament is real in the lives of Christian Dalit women. As they read and reflect on Psalm 22 they are greatly encouraged and comforted. Even if they

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<sup>71</sup> Reflection 5 from Reflections and Commentary 6 – November 14, 2004.

<sup>72</sup> Reflection 1 from the Text and Commentary 10 – November 28, 2004.

<sup>73</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, "If God is Good and Sovereign, Why Lament?," *CTJ* 36 (2001), pp. 42-52.

do not find immediate answers to all their present problems, the very reading and reflection of the psalm supports them in their present distress.

8.6 The significance of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ: Psalm 22 is seen as a prophecy for the suffering, cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Currently some of the Dalit reading and other marginalised readings of the psalms of lament see Psalm 22 as directly relevant to the cross and therefore relevant to their own community experience.<sup>74</sup> Dalit women time and again relate their experiences with that of the psalmist in Psalm 22 and they very strongly understand the psalm in the light of the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Both Dalit men and women read the psalm as a prophecy of David concerning Jesus Christ. This gives them a concrete reading of the psalm and relates it to their own situation. This is clearly demonstrated in the following expressions: "Psalm 22 is all about the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and it is a prophecy of David."<sup>75</sup> "Psalm 22 is written by David as a prophetic song about Jesus Christ."<sup>76</sup> "Psalm 22 a psalm of David depicts the life, work, cross and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>77</sup>

8.6.1 *Psalm 22 as the Passion of Christ:* Several expressions in the Dalit women's reflections on Psalm 22 reaffirm the passion of Jesus Christ. In fact, the very passion of Jesus Christ helps these Dalit women to identify their dalitness with the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross. What does the passion of Jesus Christ mean for the Dalit Christian women in the midst of their perennial suffering in this world? The words of one Dalit woman try to answer this question:

I see the situation on the cross of Jesus Christ, how Jesus was persecuted and suffered for my sake. Jesus' body was literally broken and his blood oozed out of his body until every drop had finished. Psalm 22 and the suffering of Christ on the cross together gives me a feeling

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<sup>74</sup> Thus for instance Macelo De Barros Souza, "The Powerful Prayer of Lament and the Resistance of the People of God: A Particular Approach to the Book of Psalms", in *Subversive Scriptures: revolutionary readings of the Christian bible in Latin America* edited and trans. Leif E. Vaage (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International 1997), pp. 155-72. Souza argues that Psalm 22 and other lament psalms talk about the power of God's covenant, who is the defender of the small and the liberator of the oppressed persons. Moreover these psalms also describe the suffering and pain of Jesus Christ who suffered with us and thus the marginalised people of different communities increasingly identify with the psalms.

<sup>75</sup> Text 3 – November 2, 2004.

<sup>76</sup> Text 6 – November 7, 2004.

<sup>77</sup> Text 5 – November 5, 2004.

that it throngs through like a stream overflowing with many hardships, sorrowful cries and agonizing prayers of anxious moments in an individual life.<sup>78</sup>

In the above text we can see the affirmation of a Dalit woman that God sees and knows her in her present suffering. Christ's body was broken through crucifixion and in a similar way her experience as a 'broken' woman is not far from that of Jesus. Let me bring out an example of my mother to explain this point. She being a Dalit, illiterate and poor woman, read and appropriated Psalm 22 to her own situation of dalitness and marginalization as a poor woman. Whenever she read Psalm 22 she immediately looked to the suffering of Jesus Christ and the cross. In her own way, my mother's subjective reading of Dalit suffering and as a woman who experienced poverty and sickness of her husband all through her life appropriates Psalm 22 in a more pragmatic and existential way. The words of John C. B. Webster are relevant at this point when he writes about the Dalit Christian women in Tamilnadu:

The humiliations, mockery and unjust treatment Christ suffered were, in essence, no different from those she (dalit Christian women) experiences all the time. Christ in his sufferings, both spiritual and physical, shared the harsher realities of her life. She can empathize with that and, since she shared her experience of life voluntarily, appreciate the depths of his love.<sup>79</sup>

Dalit Christian women through Psalm 22 think of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only source of their hope and comfort when they live in oppressive and discriminatory conditions in this world.

*8.6.2 Psalm 22 and the message of Resurrection:* On a couple of occasions Dalit Christian women groups reflecting on Psalm 22 link the psalm with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. These references are made with a couple of perspectives in mind. First, the resurrection of Christ in the light of Psalm 22 can be viewed in the over all passion and resurrection theme in the psalm. Secondly, in the light of what is found in the second part of the psalm (in verses 22-31), the message of hope, glory and the salvation of God are seen as signs of Christ's resurrection power. The words of one Dalit Christian woman and man affirm this:

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<sup>78</sup> Reflection 1 from the Text and Commentary 10 – November 28, 2004.

<sup>79</sup> Webster, *From Role to Identity*, p. 121.

My reflection is based on Psalm 22:11-14. It is like a cry of the one who is facing struggle in his life. It also reminds us of the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Suffering and glory are inseparable according to this psalm.<sup>80</sup>

Just as the psalmist experiences a major transformation from verse 22 of the psalm so in the resurrection of Jesus Christ we can experience hope and new life, Dalits too experience signs of transformation and renewal in our suffering and oppression. Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ we have a strong hope in spite of all our present struggles... Though our ancestors have been oppressed and we continue to be in a similar situation we have hope in the might and power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>81</sup>

The above quotations affirm that the message of defeat and death on the cross of Jesus Christ is only complete with the coming of his resurrection. Easter is celebrated by the Dalits because of the promise of victory of their affliction. It is seen as God's vindication of the victims of oppressive structures. In the words of one Dalit young theologian, Moses Paul Peter<sup>82</sup> this idea is clearly reflected:

The son of Man is crucified with the Dalits and it is Dalits who are the witnesses of resurrection. Jesus is not in our peaceful quiet cathedrals, but in the pallis, purs, nukkads, bazars and bastis, fighting against the oppression of Dalits, tribals and women. The hopeless cries of agony on the cross, and the shouts of joy of Jesus' resurrection must sound like a shout and demand in the ears of oppressors, the satisfied, and the indifferent.

Speaking about the context of Asian women and with reference to Dalit women in India Monica Melanchton argues that the resurrection of Jesus transcends all barriers and that women can find their identity in their dalitness. They (women/Dalit women) believe that the resurrected Christ has transcended all particularities including his maleness. Jesus then is a revealer and representative of a new humanity. Asian feminists see their task to assert and emphasize the humanness of Jesus, rather than his maleness<sup>83</sup>

To conclude, the themes of the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ are used as an affirmation of the strong hope and faith in the God of liberation by Dalit Christian

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<sup>80</sup> Text 8 – November 25, 2004.

<sup>81</sup> Text 1 – October 24, 2004.

<sup>82</sup> Moses Paul Peter Penumaka, "Easter and the Dalits," *VJTR* 58: 5 (1994), pp. 295-96. For a similar idea of resurrection as a strong and profound hope of the Dalits see, John O' Brien, "Towards a Sweeper Theology," *VJTR* 61 (1997), pp. 398-407. For similar ideas see Sheldon Tostengard, "Psalm 22," *Interpretation* 46: 2 (1992), pp. 167-70.

<sup>83</sup> Monica Melanchton, "Christology and Women," in Virginia Fabella & Sun Ai Lee Park (eds.) *We Dare to Dream: Doing Asian Theology as Asian Women* (Hong Kong: Asian women's Resource centre for culture and theology & Women's commission of the EATWOT, 1989), p. 18.

women. The broken body and the humiliating experience of Jesus Christ is a point for Dalit Christian women as they can empathize with him in their present broken and suffering lives. For Dalit Christian women Easter is celebrated in hope for their affliction. God gives them the support and inner strength to overcome the forces of death through the resurrection power. Resurrection is seen as God's vindication of the victims of oppressive structures.

### 8.7 Conclusion

Every Dalit reading of the Bible forcefully claims an approach that is vested in the pain and prejudices of being discriminated against. The holistic approach to life is emphasised in the Dalit Christian woman's reading of the Bible. Dalit women's interpretation of Psalm 22 demonstrates that their interpretation of the Bible is grounded in their concrete and authentic experience. This experience is shared by Dalit men and other non-Dalit women to some extent, even though it is unique to them. Dalit Christian women suffer the harsh realities of caste and class discriminations. In such a situation, the lament of the psalmist in Psalm 22 becomes meaningful in finding their cry of protest, abandonment and solace. The interpretation of Psalm 22 through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ help Dalit Christian women to find their solidarity and identity in the broken yet victorious life of Christ. Through this interpretation Dalit Christian women can rediscover their lost identity and they are able to redefine what it means to live in personal dignity in the midst of their present distress and agony. Dalit Christian women's reflection on Psalm 22 gives them "God's recognition, understanding, empathy, reassurance, forgiveness and comfort. God cares for her, listens to her, responds to her, God remembers her ... (in the) suffering she undergoes, and the pain she feels. God has the will as well as the power to overcome all obstacles and deliver her from all that weighs her down ... (*That denies her the status of full human being*)."<sup>84</sup> Dalit women's suffering gives a specific example of the suffering of an individual or community expressed in Psalm 22 and thus this psalm becomes a 'perfect' paradigm of the suffering of such distressed communities. Dalit Christian

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<sup>84</sup> Webster, *From Role to Identity*, p. 123. Emphasis in the brackets is mine.

women have contextualized the psalm in a way that speaks to their situation of suffering and oppression. The resilience, the energy, and the Dalit Christian women's desire for change could contribute to an interpretation of a biblical text like Psalm 22 that has resulted in new meanings and stimulated new ideas for transformation of self and community. Dalit woman's point of view on Psalm 22 stands distinct from among its other Dalit and non-Dalit interpretations. We shall point out some details in this regard in chapter 10 below.



## **Chapter 9**

### **Dalit Christology and Psalm 22**

#### **9.0 Introduction**

In our previous chapters we discussed the contextualization of Psalm 22 by Dalit Christians with a view to appropriating its overall message applicable to their life situation. We have consistently argued in several places that the description of the psalmist resonates with that of the life of Dalits as they reflect and appropriate the psalm. For Dalit Christians faith in God is revealed and expressed in and through Jesus Christ. To speak of Dalit Christology in the context of violence and oppression against Dalits therefore is the need of the hour. Dalit Christians find their true identity and recognition in the suffering and other models of Jesus Christ.

Christology within Dalit theology occupies an important place, because through the pain-pathos experience of Jesus Christ, through the language of Jesus' dalitness, and through the expressions of protest, Dalit theology finds its expression about God.

The development of Christology in the Christian tradition has always played an important role in the symbolic expression of cultural and religious understanding of a particular context. Christology in the Dalit perspective contextually expresses the life of Dalits in relation to Jesus Christ. Dalit Christology is developed based on the faithful reading of the Bible and applies its message to the Dalit situation. Dalit Christology is also constructed to be liberative to the Dalits to enable them to move from an oppressed mindset as well as from physical marginalization towards an emancipated life.

The encounter between the Jesus of faith and the context in which Christ is experienced by Dalits is the basis of Dalit Christology which we intend to discuss in this chapter. According to George Soares Prabhu the solidarity of Jesus Christ with the poor and the outcast finds its Christological symbol in the incarnation. In the

expression “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”—“flesh” stands for the solidarity of humankind and particularly those vulnerable people like the Dalits.<sup>1</sup>

One of the main drawbacks of nineteenth century Indian Christian theology was that it predominantly used “the religion of dominant-based literacy” that is, the high caste Hindu textual tradition. As a result of this process Indian Christian Theology became exclusive; it silenced the voices of Dalits. Moreover it “became an instrument of ideological co-operation” with the high caste community rather than human liberation for the Dalits.<sup>2</sup> This trend can be corrected by presenting Christ as divine and at the same time human that would make sense and give meaning to the millions of Christian Dalits. Thus Indian Christian Theology developed in cooperation with Dalit Christians takes Christ as a methodologically vital concept. Consequently the Dalit Christology is developed by presenting Christ as an immediate and present experience of the Dalit Christians in the midst of their oppression and marginalization.<sup>3</sup> In the context of our discussion of Psalm 22 and its relationship to a Dalit Christian interpretation, the majority of academic and non-academic interpretations hold on to the view that Psalm 22 may be interpreted in the light of the passion and death of Jesus Christ on the cross. With this kind of specific reading of the psalm we can make an authentic and relevant use of Psalm 22 for Dalit Christians.

In the above light the present chapter will firstly present three models of Dalit Christology proposed by Christian Dalit and non-Dalit scholars as helpful to the Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22; secondly it will present various themes and issues connected to the development and construction of Dalit Christology in the light of Psalm 22. In order to do this the following questions should be kept in mind: How is Psalm 22 made relevant to the Dalit Christians in the light of its usage in the New

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<sup>1</sup> George Soares- Prabhu, “Jesus of Faith: A Christological Contribution,” in K.C. Abraham and Bernadett Mbug-Beya (eds.) *Spirituality of the Third World* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), pp. 139-64.

<sup>2</sup> Sathianathan Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, p. 182.

<sup>3</sup> For some of the views on this trend see K. P. Aleaz, “Some Features of a Dalit Theology,” *AJT* 18:1(2004), pp. 146-167.

Testament? How can Christology challenge our faith in a violence-ridden context among Dalits? What will be the nature and content of such a Christology?

### 9.1 Three Models of Dalit Christology

The development of Dalit Christology goes back to the question of God raised in the formulation of Dalit theology by the Christian Dalit and non-Dalit scholars. In this process they affirmed that the God of the Dalits is a servant God described after the model of the suffering Servant in Deutero Isaiah. Based on this principle, it has been argued that Dalits in India are known for serving others. In the following years three different but related models developed as concrete expressions of Dalit Christology.

9.1.1 Jesus Christ, the suffering Servant: In Dalit theology the suffering servant image portrayed in the prophetic text of Isaiah 53: 1-8 has become the foundational assertion of Jesus Christ as the suffering servant who takes an active part in the day to day struggles of Dalits. Moreover this model of the Old Testament servant image portrayed in Deutero-Isaiah is based on the pain-pathos model employed by the Dalit theological discourse. In Dalit theology, the Christological expression of Jesus Christ as the suffering servant is rooted in the rejectedness of Dalits, which enables them to understand the suffering servant image of Deutero-Isaiah better. The words of a pioneer Christian Dalit theologian A. P. Nirmal are relevant on this point:

The God whom Jesus Christ revealed and about whom the prophets of the Old Testament spoke is a Dalit God. He is a servant God—a God who serves... To speak of a servant God, therefore is to recognize and identify him as a truly Dalit deity. The Gospel writers identified Jesus with the Servant of God of prophet Isaiah. The language used to describe the servant language full of pathos is the language used for God, the God of Dalits. But that is also the language which mirrors our own pathos as Dalits, the language that mirrors the God of Dalits and Dalits themselves.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the rejectedness of Jesus Christ is also reflected in the understanding of the suffering of the Son of Man. A. P. Nirmal reflects on this when he writes:

these sayings (Mk 8:31, 9:12, 10:45) indicate that Jesus as the Son of Man had to encounter rejection, mockery, contempt, suffering and finally death. All this from the dominant religious tradition and the established religion. He underwent these Dalit experience as the prototype of all Dalits.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Arvind P. Nirmal, *Heuristic Explorations* (Madras: CLS, 1991), p. 150.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 157.

Jesus chose to be a Dalit, an outcaste, unrecognised by society. He became the rejected stone, but was elevated as the keystone in the revolutionary process. The words of Samuel Rayan affirm the same:

Rejected and thrown out of the vineyard and out of the town, Jesus finds himself outside the walls where the untouchables are forced to live and suffer. He finds himself among the external groups, those pushed out of society and excluded from its wealth and culture which, however, they have worked to create... (He) suffered outside the camp in order to disclose, proclaim, and affirm the unborn dignity and the native purity of all our castes. All who would participate in the feeding and life-giving love and struggle of Jesus will have to seek him outside the city, with the lost, the lowliest, and the least.<sup>6</sup>

Through the suffering servant model of Jesus Christ depicted by Deutero-Isaiah and in the New Testament, Jesus became a slave, a Dalit. Thus Dalit Christology is deeply rooted in the suffering servant model of Jesus Christ, a perfect model for a suffering Dalit community in their daily lives.

9.1.2 Jesus Christ as a Dalit: Related to the above model of Dalit Christology, the dalitness of Jesus, the dalitness of God and the meeting point of the dalitness of Dalits and of God in Jesus Christ. In fact Jesus was considered to be a Dalit of his own day. M. Gnanavaram express the same.

Jesus who came from marginalized Galilee, especially from Nazareth, is portrayed as the Messiah of the Dalits; the Galileans, the Samaritans, the *am-ha-arez* (the people of the land), the outcastes, the women, the sinners and the tax collectors, the sick, the poor and all the lowly... Jesus announced that the kingdom of God has come upon the people. He said that the kingdom was the kingdom of the poor who were no-people in those days. It is from the kingdom of God in which the liberation from oppression is realized.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus Christ is a Dalit because he manifested and displayed on the cross God's love for all humanity, in particular to the broken and oppressed, downtrodden and marginalised Dalits. Christ has made the Dalits liberated servants enabling them to continue their struggle for freedom against all suffering, with the assurance that he will come again to consummate his rule on earth.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Samuel Rayan, "Outside the Gate, Sharing the Insult," in Felix Wilfred (ed) *Leave the Temple: Indian Paths to Human Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), pp. 138-39.

<sup>7</sup> M. Gnanavaram, "Eschatology in Dalit Perspective," in V. Devasahayam (ed) *Frontiers of Dalit Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1997), p. 480.

<sup>8</sup> M. E. Prabhakar, "Christology in Dalit Perspective," in V. Devasahayam (ed) *Frontiers of Dalit Theology*, p. 419.

The dalitness of Jesus Christ has a strong influence in the messianic understanding of Jesus and his relationship to Dalit Christology. Explaining the same idea V.

Devasahayam makes a remark:

Dalits for long have been looking for Messiahs from outside, but Jesus as one among the oppressed collective can be a more authentic Messiah than Jesus who comes as an intruder into history and as non-oppressed person.<sup>9</sup>

Dalit Christians also affirm the fact of Jesus as Dalit God through the following creed of faith:

We believe in God, our Mother and Father;  
Sustainer, Protector and Helper of Dalits.  
Our ancestors were an original people of India  
Enslaved in our own country by evil forces  
And Broken, oppressed and segregated as  
Outcastes and Untouchables through the ages.  
Our cries for liberation from harsh caste-bondage  
Were heard by God, who came to us in Jesus Christ  
To live with us and save all people from their sins.  
We believe in Jesus Christ, born to the virgin Mary  
And anointed by God's Spirit as the Son of God  
To unseat the proud and unjust rulers  
To bring down the rich and mighty  
And to exalt the poor and oppressed  
He will bring justice to all humanity.  
Suffering as the Human One and Servant of God  
He took our oppression and pain upon him  
And laid down his life on the cross to redeem us  
He was dead and buried but rose again to live forever.  
He created a new humanity and a new future under God  
To realise our full humanity and image of God in us  
Jesus Christ is our Lord, Saviour and Liberator.  
We believe in the Holy Spirit, our comforter  
Who enlivens and unites and empowers us  
To obtain the glorious freedom of the children of God.  
We believe in the Church, the Body of Christ  
And His fellowship to create equality and justice on earth.  
We believe that Christ will come again  
To judge all nations, according to their deeds to justice  
And to establish God's rule of righteousness,  
Forever and ever, Amen.<sup>10</sup>

Dalit Christians on the whole affirm their common ideology derived from Jesus' dalitness. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth provide the Dalits

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<sup>9</sup> V. Devasahayam, "The Norms of Theology," in V. Devasahayam (ed) *Frontiers of Dalit Theology*, p. 48.

<sup>10</sup> M. E. Prabhakar, "Christology in Dalit Perspective." pp. 419-20.

with an ideology. This ideology is also deeply rooted in an incarnational ideology. All these factors together constitute the formulation and development of Dalit Christology.<sup>11</sup>

9.1.3 Jesus Christ as the Drum: Dalit Christology has developed in the last decade based on the powerful and dominant symbol of drum. The drum functions as a symbol of both resistance and emancipation in the lives of Dalit communities.<sup>12</sup> The drum becomes a powerful symbol for Christian Dalit communities if it is interpreted in the light of Jesus Christ. The drum as a powerful religious symbol of Dalit liberation and emancipation has emerged in the context of two allegations against nineteenth century Indian Christian Theology. First, Indian Christian Theology appears to be exclusive and non-dialogical in turning a deaf ear to the collective religious resources of the Dalits. Second, Indian Christian Theology fosters the hegemonic objectives of the caste communities. Thus, through the re-collection of the religious world of Dalits the liberative dimensions of theology can be captured that will address the needs of Dalits in India.<sup>13</sup> The liberative dimensions of the drum are found in the Paraiyars, a south Indian Dalit community. Among many other aspects two notable features can be found in the use of the drum by the Paraiyars. First, Paraiyars establish their human identity in interrelationship with other caste groups through their participation in the ritual community and second, reiterate their particular authority as human mediators and controllers of sacred powers with which the caste communities need to be reconciled.<sup>14</sup>

In Indian Christian Theology, Christ is a methodologically vital concept. In Christian faith Christ qualifies the conception of God. The development of Dalit Christology is through harmonizing of its expansive and constrictive poles. The expansive pole of Christology provides a possibility for an interpretation of Christ's presence in

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<sup>11</sup> "Seminar Statement" in Arvind P. Nirmal (ed) *Towards a Common Dalit Ideology*, pp. 131-32.

<sup>12</sup> There are exceptions to this view. For instance it was reported that in a small village of Muthialapad in Andhra Pradesh, South India, where among the low caste Christian Māla community playing of the drum associated with an annual village festival was considered to be a symbol of degradation. See Duncan Forrester, *Theological Fragments: Explorations in Unsystematic Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), pp. 103-04.

<sup>13</sup> Sathianathan Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 191.



consonance with the drum in the religious tradition of the Paraiyar. Thus through the interpretation of Christ as drum, the immanent presence of God is experienced among Dalits as emancipatory resistance and reconciliation. The drum in the communal experience of the Paraiyar is intimately tied up with the experience of the divine that operates among them. The constrictive pole of Christology focuses on Jesus of Nazareth. The drum enables the constrictive pole of Christology to stress the ambiguity involved in interpreting Jesus. Jesus is made here hermeneutically open-ended. Two levels of interpretation of Jesus Christ can be deduced here. (i) On a formal level, interpreting Jesus in terms of the drum involves a shift from concerns of Jesus' ontology to his function and from a corresponding notion of determining validity to an acceptance of ambiguity and plurality and (ii) On the material level, Jesus is the deviant. Jesus' placement is deliberately with those that are displaced. Jesus' ministry deliberately focuses on his solidarity with the outcast and marginalized in his society. Jesus is with the Dalits who were confined to living in places that were outside the normal places. They simply have to tune themselves into the vibrant sound of the drum that has always surrounded them.<sup>15</sup>

Thus Jesus as the drum or as a drum player becomes a pivotal point in resisting humiliation and the sound of the drum evokes conscientious effort among the Dalits to resist dehumanisation and just as Jesus is the saviour and is reconciled with everyone, let Dalits reconcile with others to build a just and humane society.

## **9.2 Interpretation of Psalm 22 in Relation to a Dalit Christology**

Psalm 22 is interpreted in relation to the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ as quoted by the Gospel writers in the New Testament. The Early Christian writings affirmed the same expression. The words of Esther Menn capture this point:

For early Christian community Psalm 22, along with other lament psalms, verses from the Torah, and prophetic passages, provide illuminating clues concerning the meaning of Jesus' shocking death within the religious framework provided by the Jewish scriptures.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 185-208.

<sup>16</sup> Esther Menn, "No Ordinary Lament." p. 328. Menn cites two texts as example in this regard. She writes: "The depiction of Jesus interpreting the scriptures for the two men on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:25-27, and for the eleven disciples and his companions in Luke 24:45-47, narratively portrays the importance of christological interpretation of the Jewish scriptures for the formation of the early church."

From then on the New Testament also links the experience of Jesus Christ with that of the experience of the psalmist. The words of James L. Mays make this point clear:

The experiences of the one who prays in the psalm (Psalm 22) become part of the scenario of the passion. So, the Gospels draw a connection not only between the prayers of Jesus and the psalm, but as well between the person of Jesus and the person portrayed in the self-description of the psalm ... Because of the close connection of the Psalm 22 with Jesus, it became the predominant custom in the early church to take the psalm as Jesus' words and relocate it completely in a Christological context.<sup>17</sup>

The same trend continues in today's world as Dalit and other Christians view the psalm in the light of the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ integrates the three models discussed above in the Dalit Christian interpretation of Psalm 22.

9.2.1 The Passion of Jesus Christ and its relationship to Psalm 22: One of the main features of Dalit Christology is to talk about the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross and its consonance with the suffering of millions of Dalits in the present world. In fact the concrete expressions of a Dalit interpretation of the Bible emerge from this trend.

The suffering of Jesus Christ and its parallels from Psalm 22 can be specifically noted in two aspects. First, the experience of the remoteness of God both by the psalmist and Jesus Christ. Second, the passion narratives draw on the language of mockery and insult from Psalm 22 as applicable to Jesus on the cross. We shall examine each of them briefly here and see their relevance to Dalit Christology.

*9.2.1.1 The experience of the remoteness/forsakenness by God:* Jesus as the Son of God uses the prayer to describe his worst experience of suffering. For the psalmist in Psalm 22, God is his central problem, the focus of his pain. The psalmist undergoes the contradiction of faith and experience in his life. On the one hand he is recollecting the past deeds of God in the salvation history of God's people who are his own ancestors and who experienced God's salvation while on the other hand the psalmist feels emptiness at present that all the past deeds of God are not working in

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<sup>17</sup> Mays, "Prayer and Christology." pp. 322-23.

his own life. So theologically, the psalmist speaks of this contradiction as forsakenness, as the distance from God.<sup>18</sup>

Jesus experienced the similar alienation and remoteness of God as was the case with the psalmist in Psalm 22. The words of Sheldon Tostengard reflect a similar view.

He writes:

the Godforsakenness of Jesus cannot be taken to be a charade of helpful metaphor but must be taken absolutely seriously. The depth of the forsakenness of the psalmist serves as a proper background for the depth of the experience of the cross.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover the cry of abandonment by Jesus on the cross indicates his experience of rejection and pain in the most agonizing moments of his life. These words are nothing but the experience of separation of the Son from the Father. The cry of despair and anguish reveals the extreme feeling of abandonment of Jesus with his Father and thus he went to the extent of 'questioning' God the Father. The words of Jürgen Moltmann affirm the same. He writes:

In the death of Jesus the deity and of his God and Father is at stake. Jesus is then calling upon the deity and the faithfulness of his Father against his rejection and the non-deity of his Father. This can be put in an exaggerated form: the cry of Jesus in the words of Ps. 22 means not only 'My God why hast thou forsaken me?' but at the same time, 'My God, why hast thou forsaken *thyself*?' In the theological context of what he preached and lived, the unity of Jesus and God must be emphasized as strongly as this.<sup>20</sup>

Dalit theologians are exploring this dimension of Jesus' experience of abandonment on the cross as a clue for his identity with the Dalits. Devasahayam observes:

As Jesus said 'my God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?' he enters into the depths of human experience of agony. It was an experience of desolation and solitude, an experience of rejection by people and God ... The Gospels gave a view of hard heartedness of the priestly class, theologians and religious leaders who were mocking at the suffering and the dying person.<sup>21</sup>

Speaking on a similar point Nirmal sums up the integral link between Jesus' sufferings on the cross as the rejected person with that of Dalit experience in the contemporary world. Nirmal's words are as follows:

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 326.

<sup>19</sup> Sheldon Tostengard, "Expository Article: Psalm 22." p. 170.

<sup>20</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1974), p. 151.

On the cross, he was the broken, the crushed, the split, the torn, the driven-asunder man—the dalit in the fullest possible meaning of that term. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” he cries aloud from the cross. The Son of God feels that he is God-forsaken. That feeling of being God-forsaken is at the heart of our dalit experiences and dalit consciousness in India. It is the dalitness of the divinity and humanity that the cross of Jesus symbolizes.<sup>22</sup>

Dalit Christians in present day India feel that the experience of Jesus on the cross is similar to their own experience. In one of the discussion groups reflecting on Psalm 22 the members in the group feel that Jesus Christ and his abandonment by God is their similar experience. The summary of the discussion group on one of the major points in Psalm 22 is as follows:

We need to appropriate this Psalm both for Christians in general in their suffering situation and to the suffering of Dalit Christians in particular. On the basis of Psalm 22:7-8 four concerns can be noted as follows: (i) Why did Christ pray in this way as an abandoned individual? He was mocked, not exempted from the cross. (ii) This is also the cry of a baby. This is a new experience to Christ as a sinless and guiltless person. Christ as a man burdened with sin could not face God. This psalm thus reveals that we are not suffering alone, Christ is also suffering with us, we are in the deep crisis of suffering, and even Christ already suffered for and on behalf of us. (iii) We can overcome any amount of hardships, struggles as Christian Dalits.<sup>23</sup> But in the end we will be able to praise God just as the change of mood is noticed in this psalm. (iv) As Dalit Christians we are expected to appropriate this psalm for our life and faith in this world. The lament mood of the psalm befits our Dalit struggle in this world. Several of the points described in this psalm can be literally viewed in the lives of Dalits.<sup>24</sup>

As noted earlier, Dalit Christian women view their experience of abandonment as similar to what is described by the psalmist in Psalm 22 and in the words of

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<sup>21</sup> V. Devasahayam, “The Nature of Dalit Theology as Counter Ideology,” V. Devasahayam (ed) *Frontiers of Dalit Theology*, p. 62.

<sup>22</sup> Arvind P. Nirmal, “Towards a Christian Dalit Theology,” in R. S. Sugirtharajah (ed) *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), p. 39.

<sup>23</sup> The group is talking about several cases of Dalit Christian assault in parts of North India during the BJP central government in India until the mid year of 2004. Some Churches were burnt and Christian preachers were attacked by the Hindu activists.

<sup>24</sup> Commentary 3 – November 2, 2004.

abandonment by Jesus Christ on the cross. Reflecting on the violence meted out to Dalit and Black women, a feminist Dalit theologian observes:

A woman hanging upside down, as if to be roasted for the next meal! Kauser Bano is captured to satiate the "hunger" of violence by the mob. So also is the nameless Black woman. Perhaps their scream of helplessness like that of Jesus: 'My God, My God, why did you forsake me', is drowned by the noise of violence around them.... (They also cry) "My God, My God, don't forsake your children who need courage/strength from you."<sup>25</sup>

Some Dalit Christian women have found that they have a special empathetic appreciation for the sufferings of Christ through which God's love for an undeserving world was revealed. As Christ's body was broken through crucifixion, a Dalit woman's body too gets broken by hard labour; by bending over for hours on end to plant, to weed, to transplant, to harvest rice or carry bricks on her head from one part of a construction site to another. In addition, some of them experience being beaten by a drunken husband who has his own frustrations to deal with. The humiliations, mockery and unjust treatment Jesus suffered were, in essence, no different from those she experiences all the time. Christ in his sufferings, both spiritual and physical, shared the harsher realities of her life.<sup>26</sup>

The experience of God's abandonment on the cross is thus linked with the present suffering of Christian Dalits in India. Their experience too resonates with that of Jesus.

#### 9.2.1.2 Mockery and insult from Psalm 22 as applicable to Jesus on the cross:

Another prominent motif in the passion narratives that draws on the language of the Psalm 22 is the mockery of Jesus by his enemies. As already described in chapter 5 in connection with Esther Menn's application of Psalm 22 with that of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, all the four gospels, but in particular the synoptic gospels, emphasize the derision and taunting that Jesus suffered from Jewish authorities, Roman soldiers, Herod and his guards, passers-by at Golgotha, and the criminals executed beside him. These repeated descriptions of the words of mockery and

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<sup>25</sup> Evangeline Anderson-Rajkumar, "Politicising the Body: A Feminist Christology," *AJT* 18:1(2004), p. 92.

<sup>26</sup> Webster et al. *From Role to Identity*, p. 121.

taunting in the gospels can be found with same motif in the Psalm 22:6-9, 13-14, 17-19.

The experience of the psalmist in Psalm 22 and the experience of mockery and insult by Jesus Christ on the cross have a profound meaning and relevance for Christian Dalits in their oppressive situation. This is what a Dalit Christian preacher points to when he reflects on the integral link between Psalm 22, Jesus Christ and Dalit Christians. His words echo the powerful link between the suffering of Christian Dalits as compared to the psalmist in Psalm 22 and synoptic gospel quotations of Psalm 22 in the New Testament.

[T]he psalm describes the severe physical torment and suffering of the psalmist. In a similar way Christ was mocked on the Cross. We too face similar situations as Dalits in our daily life ... Verses 12-18 depict more intense suffering. Jesus Christ faced several kinds of suffering, intimidation and insult like us in all respects ... All the animal imagery mentioned in this section refers to our suffering and torment as Dalits. But we have confidence and hope because Christ already suffered for us and was one among us.<sup>27</sup>

With a similar force Mohan Larbeer narrates several moving incidents of the dominant caste people insulting and intimidating the cause of Dalits even when it is their right and privilege. He writes about one such incident:

A young boy belonging to the oppressed community from another village after his schooling managed to secure a job in a big city. During his leave, he came to his village to see his parents. He was well dressed now, and this irritated the high-caste people who confronted him. Since he was educated and used to city ways, he challenged them saying that he was their equal and he had every right to walk along any street. That night he was murdered. The police played it cool. The government kept quiet. There were protest rallies and hunger strikes. The end result was nothing. The cry from the soul of these people too is: "God why have you forsaken us?"<sup>28</sup>

Further Larbeer argues that our theological reflection on God must start from our encounter with God in the experience of untouchability meted out to Dalits in their every day life. The Dalits are mocked and insulted for being born as Dalits and are subjected to insult and shame and in extreme cases are subjected to death. In such a context the mockery and insult of Jesus Christ on the cross becomes relevant and meaningful for the millions of suffering Dalit Christians.

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<sup>27</sup> Text 3 – November 2, 2004.

<sup>28</sup> P. Mohan Larbeer, "The Spirit of Truth and Dalit Liberation," *ER* 42: 3-4 (1990), p. 230.



Vimala Rani<sup>29</sup> from Andhra Pradesh still remembers how she was humiliated in her school days by her Brahmin colleagues and teachers. She expresses her agony that every day working in her school harsh comments were passed on her by the dominant caste colleagues. These comments were made because of the fact that she was born in a low caste family and her colleagues treated her as untouchable in all respects. As a medical nurse she feels that God has brought her up to be in her present respectable position. Psalm 22 helped and comforted her when she was in distress. She also expressed the view that she is not alone in her struggle as Jesus Christ experienced the 'same' insult and mockery in the hands of those who crucified him and he was victimised for taking the side of marginalised Dalits like her. In this connection the words of William Madtha are appropriate:

Dalit theology is the theology of the Cross. Contemplation on the crucified Jesus puts steel into the backbone of the crucified but conscientized dalits ... Jesus' victimhood as well as priesthood on the Cross was a peak experience of the consequence of his option for the poor, his liturgy of life ... In dalits, the wretched of the earth, we experience Christ who is hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, homeless and imprisoned (Mt 25, 31-46)... Hence our encounter of Christ in the poor/dalits is decisive and fundamental.<sup>30</sup>

Reflecting on Psalm 22 from a Dalit perspective, a Dalit pastor argues that the mental suffering and agony caused by the enemies of the psalmist in the psalm described in verses 6-8 is far more serious and damaging than any physical suffering that an individual can face. This mental suffering and agony is comparable to the experience of Jesus Christ and Dalits as well. The following words of the preacher capture this point:

They are mocking the psalmist and they wag their heads at him. This is an act of fun making by the enemies of David. Jesus has gone through the same experience (Matt 27:29; Lk 23:35). Some children mock at their parents in their old age because of their eating habits. We as Christian Dalits are always mocked by the caste people because of our birth in the low caste and our vocation in doing certain menial jobs assigned to us. We need to bear this pain of mockery in all our educational and working places.<sup>31</sup>

Dalit women, while reflecting and appropriating Dalit Christology for their liberation, are of the view that in the ministry of Jesus, women played a key role and

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<sup>29</sup> Testimony 3 from Commentary 5 – November 5, 2004.

<sup>30</sup> William Madtha, "Dalit Theology: Voice of the Oppressed," *Journal of Dharma* 16: 1 (1991), pp. 83-84.

<sup>31</sup> Text 6 – November 7, 2004.

more particularly, in the context of his crucifixion. It was the women who stayed with him when he was subjected to mockery and insult on the cross. Many instances of women's oppression and particularly that of Dalit women find a resonance with that of Christ on the cross.<sup>32</sup> That is why some of the Dalit Christian women identify the suffering and mockery of Christ with their own suffering and mockery in the light of Psalm 22. The words of a female Dalit preacher are clear in this regard:

They stripped off his garments (John 19:24) and he could count all his bones as he feels the pain of their dislocation and breaking. Because the 'enemies' treated Christ as the defeated one they tortured him in this harsh way. This kind of suffering explained by the psalmist and its subsequent fulfilment in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross is for us, the Dalit Christian women.<sup>33</sup>

Thus the experience of mockery, insult and rejection expressed in Psalm 22 is the experience of Jesus Christ on the cross. It also means that by going through the complete process of rejection and mockery Christian Dalits found meaning and relevance in Psalm 22 in and through the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross as recorded in the New Testament.

9.2.2 The Resurrection of Jesus Christ and its relationship to Psalm 22: As noted in chapter 8 the theme of the resurrection of Jesus Christ plays a significant role in the lives of the Dalit women in relation to Psalm 22. Most often the later part of the psalm in verses 23-32 are taken to relate to the theme of resurrection. This section is thematically dominant with the motif of God's deliverance and the psalmist acknowledgment of it. The psalmist moves from the dark despair of verse one to a point where he can talk about embracing a future filled with possibilities, even proclaiming these possibilities to others. The agonising questions raised in vv1-2, seemed to have found their answer here from vv.23f. God is no longer far away, abandoning or shunning someone in deep trouble. God's face is no longer hidden; God is present in the midst of trouble. He has answered the psalmist's cry for help. These verses of the psalm also deeply reflect the faith of the psalmist. The psalmist's faith is deeply rooted in God's deliverance. The psalmist experienced mockery, derision, persecution; he looked like someone at the end of his life nearing death,

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<sup>32</sup> Monica Melanchton, "Christology and Women." pp. 15-23.

<sup>33</sup> Text 5 – November 5, 2004.

both physically and mentally. But the thanksgiving affirms the experience of being liberated from the oppression and suffering.<sup>34</sup>

Although most of the gospel narratives in the New Testament quote or make allusions to Psalm 22 from the lament section (verses 1-22), the quotation in Heb 2:12 (compare Ps 22:23) may indicate an allusion to the theme of resurrection. This is because of a "...general correspondence between the overarching upswing of the gospel narratives with the resurrection, and the conclusion of the psalm with thanksgiving."<sup>35</sup> This specific citation of Psalm 22:23 is used in Heb 2:12 as Jesus' own words. In fact this citation of the psalm appeared as prophetic of the way Jesus took—the testimony to his brothers of the one raised from the death. Although the first part of the psalm voice the tragedy of forsakenness and death of Jesus Christ on the cross, it looks beyond the death.<sup>36</sup>

Applying Psalm 22 to the New Testament context Mays argues:

The psalm interprets Jesus' passion and resurrection as a theodicy for those who commit their way to the Lord. The Gospel accounts make it very clear that he suffered and died as one of the "lowly." In the psalm, it is the dying of one who trusts in the Lord that raises the question about God, and it is his salvation that leads to the knowledge that God "has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted" (a very real possibility to Old Testament people and to moderns). Jesus' enactment of the scenario includes the affliction to death, and is ground for knowledge that whatever the anguish caused by the conflict of faith and experience may mean, it does not mean that God has failed those who cry to him. For the lowly, the passion and resurrection of Jesus is a justification of God in whom they trust and a vindication of their trust. The psalm interprets Jesus' passion and resurrection as a summons to the world (in the most inclusive sense of that term) to believe in the reign of the Lord ... In the psalm, dying is portrayed as the experience of a threefold loss: of vitality, of social support, and of God ... In the passion of Jesus, that threefold loss is undergone and he dies. But his resurrection is the signal to all who dread and undergo the threefold loss that death itself has been brought within the rule of the God of Jesus Messiah. It is the news that is of ultimate concern for all humanity.<sup>37</sup>

According to Mays and other scholars already discussed in chapters 2 and 5 the implication of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is obvious in the second section of

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<sup>34</sup> For similar ideas see Psalm 7:11; 11:7.

<sup>35</sup> Esther Menn, "No Ordinary Lament." p. 334.

<sup>36</sup> John Eaton, *The Psalms*, pp. 121-122.

<sup>37</sup> Mays, "Prayer and Christology." pp. 330-31.

Psalm 22 in verses 23-32. It is in the same light that Dalit Christians read the second part of Psalm 22.

In one of the reflection on Psalm 22 based on a Dalit perspective, the preacher interprets the entire second part of Psalm 22 from verse 22 in the light of resurrection of Jesus Christ. The preacher interprets and sums up the content of this part of Psalm 22 in the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His words echo the same:

Just as the psalmist experiences a major reorganisation from verse 22 of the psalm and in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ we can experience hope and new life, Dalits too experience signs of reorganisation and renewal in our suffering and oppression. Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ we have strong hope in spite of all our present struggles. Jesus Christ was incarnated for us and became our *avatara purushan* (incarnated man). Thus like the psalmist, in spite of our entire distressing situation, we hope in God because like the psalmist we can say that God hears our prayers. Though our ancestors have been oppressed and we continue to be in a similar situation we have hope in the might and power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>38</sup>

Dalit Christians view the resurrection as a power or symbol of the power of God through which they can overcome all the evil structures working against their oppression in this world. As already discussed in chapter 7 their fatalistic notion of suffering is redefined because of the fact that God eventually vindicates their cause and grants victory over their oppressors. This view is reflected in a Dalit pastor's reflection on Psalm 22:

For our sake Jesus Christ suffered on the Cross. For the sake of the downtrodden Christ suffered but through the resurrection hope and victory is granted to those who believe in him. In our Dalit situation, we no longer need to carry the feeling that we suffer because of our fate, rather we have a saviour who changes our fate of suffering into the joy of salvation and we are free human beings without any guilt of our sins.... In our pain we are comforted and given victory, in our death like situation we are given life through the resurrection power of Jesus Christ.<sup>39</sup>

At the same time one should not view this as a sign of weakness on the part of Christian Dalits. It can be argued in the light of how Dalit Christians think of and interpret Psalm 22 on the whole and verses 22-31 in relation to their situation and in the light of cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ may somewhat look as follows:

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<sup>38</sup> Text 1 – October 24, 2004.

<sup>39</sup> Text 9 – November 28, 2004.

On the cross Jesus Christ suffered insult, mockery and all kinds of humiliation, but in the resurrection all that was in suffering has been transformed to the glory and praise to God who conquers death and the oppressive forces of darkness. Relating it to the Dalit struggles in India, we may argue that Jesus fought against the structures and the oppressive powers of his own time and as a result has been put into “disfiguration” for a moment, but “transfiguration” took place through resurrection after the cross. Dalits, both as Christians and as a normal Dalits, look at their faith being born out of their perennial struggle against the oppressive structures, (unfolded in the form of caste and related issues) “disfiguring” their personhood, and for “transfiguration” into what they already are i.e., the very “image” and likeness of God. In this process of their struggle they see the cross and resurrection as the model for their lives as individuals and community.<sup>40</sup>

Although Psalm 22 has no direct relevance to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as we noted above, the second part of the psalm was read with that implication. Dalit Christians appropriate the second part of Psalm 22 in the light of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ as something fundamental to their very occupation. One particular Dalit group called *mādigā* Christians in their discussion group<sup>41</sup> on the reflection on Psalm 22 is of the opinion that they are proud to have an identity in Jesus Christ and his wounds on the cross. Jesus Christ invites his disciple Thomas to put his fingers into his wounded scars. In this way they claim that Jesus Christ is a Dalit God and they, in spite of present oppression, are living in hope due to Christ’s passion and resurrection.

The point of *mādigā* Christian identity on the basis of Christ’s wounds needs some discussion. Any Christian Dalit reading of the Bible seeks to appropriate the message of the Bible to the suffering situation of Dalits in their day to day lives. In this sense, this particular group along with many other *mādigā* Christians obediently receive the message of the Bible with the purpose of attacking the caste system and oppressive culture practised by the caste communities. To quote a concrete example from *mādigā* Christian experience, Jose Maliekal makes his point clear:

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<sup>40</sup> A. Maria Arul Raja, “Reading the Bible.” pp. 77-91.

When Ebenezer, the village elder and the Madiga ideologue ... boasted that St. Thomas, the Apostle, was a Madiga, because he had dared to place his fingers into the wounded flesh of Jesus, he was presenting the software-chip of a potential Madiga identity theology. He was trying to assert his pride in his traditional trade, the identity-marker of his caste, by tracing an aetiology for it and taking the stigma attached to it.<sup>42</sup>

Here we can note the point that the interpretation of a Dalit in a village context is very fluid and with due respect (in the sense of the hermeneutics of respect) to the Bible.<sup>43</sup> Although this interpretation of Ebenezer is overdone, nevertheless it helps him to interpret the Bible in his own community context. On this kind of reader centred interpretation of a biblical text Maria Arul Raja notes that Dalit hermeneutics chooses to:

[S]tand between the text (the Bible) and the addressee (Dalits), rather than between the addresser (biblical authors) and the text.<sup>44</sup>

This group of mādigā Christians are proud to talk about their God-given vocation and believe that the very wounds of Jesus Christ are helpful to them to assert their strong caste identity with the hope that Jesus as a Dalit God is their partner in their suffering and oppression. The resurrected Christ has made it possible for them to turn their derogatory labels of occupation into an identity marker and they can now find their solidarity with the resurrected Christ.

Arvind Nirmal sums up his reflection on Dalit Christology in similar lines:

God is one with the broken. God suffers when his people suffer. He weeps when his people weep. He laughs when his people laugh. He dies in his people's death, and he rises again in his people's resurrection.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> See Commentary 9 – November 28, 2004.

<sup>42</sup> Jose Maliekal, "Identity-Consciousness of the Christian Madigas: Story of a People in Emergence," *Jeevadhara* 31: 181 (2001), p. 25.

<sup>43</sup> See Sathianathan Clarke, "Viewing the Bible," p. 260. Clarke notes that "The Bible is a fluid referent for Subalterns (Dalits inclusive). It holds together a novel dialectic that does not easily end in closure: the dynamic of a correction which itself is a contextual assertion in need of further rectification."

<sup>44</sup> A. Maria Arul Raja, "A Dialogue between Dalits and Bible: Certain Indicators for Interpretation," *Journal of Dharma* 26: 1 (1999), p. 44.

<sup>45</sup> Arvind Nirmal, "Towards a Christian Dalit Theology," in R. S. Sugirtharajah (ed) *Frontiers in Asian Christian Theology*, p. 40.



The above discussion confirms that the cross and resurrection are part and parcel of a Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22. The power of resurrection is experienced in the light of the insult and mockery experienced by the Dalits and with this power they can overcome and experience God's liberation in their present life. Thus comments a Dalit young woman when she reflects on Psalm 22 in a youth group:

We suffer due to our dalitness at present and yet we are strong as we draw our hope and power from our Lord Jesus Christ, his cross and resurrection.<sup>46</sup>

9.2.3 The cry of protest in Psalm 22 and its relationship to Jesus Christ: Some would argue that the opening words of Psalm 22: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" are the words of protest uttered by the psalmist at the time of his anguish and agony. The protest language is veiled in the psalmist's questioning of God in the opening verses of Psalm 22. This questioning and protest language has to be seen in the light of two parties—God and the lamenter, both are in argument as the lamenter seeks the active involvement of God in his present distress and lament situation. The words of Walter Brueggemann are illustrative on this point:

What difference does it make to have faith that permits and requires this form (lament) of prayer? My answer is that it shifts the calculus and *redresses the distribution of power* between the two parties, so that the petitionary party is taken seriously and the God who is addressed is newly engaged in the crisis in a way that puts God at risk. As the lesser, petitionary party (the Psalm speaker) is legitimated, so the unmitigated supremacy of the greater party (God) is questioned and God is made available to the petitioner. The basis for the conclusion that the petitioner is taken seriously and legitimately granted power in the relation is that the speech of the petitioner is heard, valued and transmitted as a serious speech ... the lament form thus concerns a redistribution of power.<sup>47</sup>

A language of protest may be a legitimate response to suffering. In fact it may be the only a genuine language of the oppressed and afflicted in their situation. As pointed out by Brueggemann, lament implores God to be compassionate to those who suffer in their present condition. Ps.39 and the Book of Job are two examples which demonstrate this point. In both cases the lamenter and the sufferer reflects on the severe pain that the lamenter is subjected to. The lament implores God to be compassionate to those who suffer. The way in which it implores God comes out of a

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<sup>46</sup> Text 2 – October 31, 2004.

<sup>47</sup> Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, pp. 101-02.

protest language. For Norman Gottwald, this language of protest found in the psalms of lament has to do with the socio-economic context of the people themselves. He writes:

[T]here can be little doubt that an enormous part of the suffering which the psalmists protest is the *pauperization of the populace* through the manipulation of debts and confiscation procedures in such a way that even the traditional courts of Israel can be used to amass wealth in defiance of the explicit laws of the community. In fact, because the oppressors so flagrantly violate the laws attributed to deity, their conduct and attitude loudly declare, "there is no God!"—no matter how piously they may dress up their appearance.<sup>48</sup>

When we talk about protest in terms of a conversation between God and the lamenter three specific concerns may be taken into consideration: First: in the laments as in Psalm 22 no flattering of God is possible. Yahweh can be directly confronted with bold confidence; Second: even in anger, the psalmist in Psalm 22 affirms Yahweh's fidelity (vv. 4-5), that is Yahweh's genuine intervention is sought (v.11); Third: the result of such a protest is the pathos of God, God's response (vv. 22-31 in Psalm 22), God's active involvement (v.24) and finally it reveals God's character itself.<sup>49</sup>

Applying the dimension of protest language presented in Psalm 22 in relation to Jesus Christ, a young Dalit preacher says:

Psalm 22 can be seen in the light of Dalit consciousness and Dalit hope. It is also related to the experience of Dalit suffering, protest and lament. The psalmist doubts the power of God. On the one hand because of his confusing and depressing condition he blames God ... the psalmist tend to question God because of his pain and agony. Even Christ identifies with the sufferings of Dalits. Dalits feel abandoned by God like the psalmist and Jesus Christ... A revolutionary Telugu poet called Gaddar has questioned the social system in Andhra Pradesh oppressing poor Dalits in several colonies and villages. In such a situation the expressions of lament mentioned in the psalm are relevant in the lives of poor Dalits. The dimension of hope found in the psalm is real and in order to experience the same Gaddar's model of protest fits into the interpretation of Psalm 22. The protest question: 'God, why have you abandoned me?' expressed by the psalmist, Jesus and Dalits becomes an important hermeneutical question.<sup>50</sup>

When applied to Dalit Christology, the dimension of protest expressed in Psalm 22 plays a very significant contribution which not only challenges the traditional interpretation of the Bible and Christianity in India, but also presents Jesus Christ as unique to the Christian Dalits. Earlier in our discussion on the three models of Dalit

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<sup>48</sup> Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 539.

<sup>49</sup> Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>50</sup> Reflection 1 in Text 8 – November 25, 2004.

Christology, we briefly described the aspect of Christ as the drum and as a symbolic and methodological representation of Dalit Christological discourse. For Dalit communities from South India the drum functions to assert their human identity in the midst of high caste communities and to reiterate their authority as human mediators and controllers of sacred powers. The words of Sathianathan Clarke are affirmative on this point:

The drum mediates the Divine presence which empowers them to appropriate their human and humane valuation as communicated to them within the nexus of this Divine-human relationship. On the other hand, the christic presence represented by the drum enables them to assert this human self-affirmation acquired before the Divine in the face of a concerted religious, social, economic and cultural scheme devised and perpetuated by caste communities to value the Dalits as either non-human or less-than-human.<sup>51</sup>

Working out his interpretation of the praxis of Jesus that is in consonance with the drum as a powerful religious symbol of Dalits, Sathianathan Clarke used a model of 'Jesus the deviant' proposed by Malina and Neyrey.<sup>52</sup> Clarke applies this model by using the explanation of J. D. Crossan's concreteness of Jesus' location.<sup>53</sup> The main point on which Clarke argues and builds his case is: Jesus' placement is deliberately with those that are displaced. He states:

A significant feature of Jesus results from his being immanent among those 'out of normal place'. The drum associates the christic presence particularly among those outside of the realm and space of the sacred word ... On the one hand, he (Jesus) contemptuously 'violates lines' that are accepted as distinguishing the pure from the polluted; on the other hand, his actions, especially those directed against the dominant communities, suggest that he was initiating and inspiring subaltern resistance against the deviance-producing forces ... In the Indian context, in the first instance, Jesus as deviant pervades the social, economic and cultural situatedness of the Dalits and authenticates their humanity before God even though they have been placed outside of the definitions of the human by the caste community. In the second instance, Jesus as deviant embodies the forces of Christ that resist the colonizing and demonizing interpretative trends of the hegemonic knowledge-producing human machinery through an affirmation of the particularity of the humaneness and humanness of the Dalits, which is realized in the context of the presence of God with them.<sup>54</sup>

It is important to note that Jesus' deviance is typically characterized in his taking a stand against and even registering a protest against those that threaten the survival of

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<sup>51</sup> Sathianathan Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, pp. 190-191.

<sup>52</sup> Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H Neyrey, *Calling Jesus Names: The Social Values of Labels in Matthew* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1988).

<sup>53</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994).

the marginalized class of the society. "In Jesus we perceive an agent of the Divine who says 'NO' to the valuation of the vested class/caste/gender."<sup>55</sup> This picture of Jesus as deviant contrasts with that of Jesus who is depicted as merely meek, passive, gentle and kind. In fact this model of Jesus is helpful for Christian Dalits who want to be liberated from the Jesus as suffering servant model and the pain-pathos concept that advocated Dalit suffering as 'God's will'. This feeling is expressed in the words of Antony Raj as follows: "I feel that it is better for us Dalits to die on our feet than live on our knees before insolent men."<sup>56</sup>

That is why many Dalit women in their present suffering immediately identify Jesus' suffering as their own and at the same time some women actively notice the point that all the suffering is not divine and that suffering is imposed by their oppressors for taking a stand against injustice and oppression. The words of Kyung are relevant on this point:

This image of Jesus' sufferings gives Asian women the wisdom to differentiate between the suffering imposed by an oppressor and the suffering that is the consequence of one's stand for justice and human dignity<sup>57</sup>

Again one Dalit preacher, while reflecting on Psalm 22 in a Dalit congregation, affirms that the cry of the psalmist in the psalm is a protest cry and this cry is relevant in their present socio-economic condition. His words are as follows:

Several people belonging to upper castes have become rich at the expense of the Dalits. Dalits suffer for the want of proper houses and other basic amenities in many parts of our land. In our own land Dalit workers are not paid proper wages ... In such a situation Dalits in KGF are crying to God like the psalmist 'why have you forsaken me?' They also cry by saying 'how long do we have to suffer?' Economically we are exploited due to the impact of globalisation. TNC's and MNC's play an important role in our lives. Only the rich can survive in this world. Poor farmers and daily wage workers have to suffer for want of enough resources for their daily survival. Several land lords have benefited by our lands either occupying them by force or making us mortgage them and eventually we lost our own land for the sake of huge debts to manage our daily lives. These landlords are like the 'cows of Bashan.'<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Sathianathan Clarke, *Dalits and Christianity*, pp. 202-203.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p. 204.

<sup>56</sup> Antony Raj, "Disobedience: A Legitimate Act for Dalit Liberation," in Arvind P. Nirmal (ed) *Towards a Common Dalit Ideology*, p. 51.

<sup>57</sup> Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 57.

<sup>58</sup> Text 7 – November 21, 2004.

Even we can observe how the Christian Dalits are engrossed in reading Psalm 22 as they immediately relate it to the situation of David of the Old Testament as its author. Thus they see the struggles of David as their own struggles and the protest of the psalmist as their own historical and socio-political experience. The words of a Dalit pastor reveal this point:

David comes to God in his depressing moments. He was like an abandoned, oppressed and depressed one as Dalits in India are today. Aryans have oppressed and controlled Dalits long before their present oppression. Prior to David's kingship and even during his kingship a gang rose against him and this gang was trying to give lot of trouble to him. David is writing this psalm with burdens, in a lamenting mood and in a mood of protest. When we see all the contents here written by David it looks as if this psalm is written for the sake of Dalits. We too protest and ask our God in our present situation as the psalmist had done: 'My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' This psalm is the *anubhavam* (experience) of Dalits.<sup>59</sup>

This kind of reading of the psalm helps Dalit Christians to appropriate the figure of Jesus Christ as deviant one who came down to suffer along with them and at the same time resist and protest all that authentically denies the fullness of humanity to them and also to subvert all the evil forces operative to put them under degradation.

### 9.3 Conclusion

Psalm 22 is overwhelmingly taken to interpret Christology from the New Testament point of view. As noted in this and chapter 3 above the cry of dereliction of Jesus presented in the opening verse of Psalm 22, the occurrences of the crowd and people mocking and insulting Jesus at the crucifixion are some of the ways in which the psalm had been used to appropriate the suffering of Jesus in the New Testament.

Although most of the allusions related to Psalm 22 in the New Testament are from the lament section of the psalm, the resurrection and post-resurrection event of Jesus seem to have been alluded to in the Letter to the Hebrews and are also an important part of the interpretation of Christology from the second part of Psalm 22 (vv.23-32). Dalit Christians appropriate their struggle and hope from the second part of Psalm 22 in the light of Christ's resurrection in the New Testament.

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<sup>59</sup> Text 1 – October 24, 2004.

The cry of abandonment seen in the light of a protest cry may lead Dalit Christian communities to interpret Jesus Christ as the drum, a symbol of emancipation and resistance. Psalm 22 in relation to Dalit Christology demonstrates that Jesus Christ in his solidarity with the suffering Dalits, provides them with concrete and pragmatic ways in which they can talk about God's liberative action. In this way Dalit Christians made Christology as a specific reading context of Psalm 22 to articulate their grief and faith.

The identification of the suffering/resisting/victorious individual in Psalm 22 as Jesus Christ has the power to inform the identity of millions of Christian Dalits, whose lives find meaning, hope and identity in their present suffering and hope of deliverance towards emancipation. Like some of its non-Dalit partners Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22 takes Christology as a key point in their interpretation. But for Dalits the emphasis falls on a particular aspect of Christology (as already noted in chapter 7 above). We shall present more details in the next chapter in this regard.



## Chapter 10

### Conversation Among Contextual Interpretations of Psalm 22

#### 10.0 Introduction

Our investigation of Psalm 22 was a long hermeneutical itinerary by way of examining it in the light of historical critical, Early Christian, and Dalit Christian interpretations. We began our search with a historical critical and rhetorical critical explanation of the psalm. It was argued that the psalm contains two discrete parts of lament and thanksgiving well knit together both structurally and by the overarching upswing of the themes of distress and deliverance. By means of a structural transition marker (oracle of salvation or rescue), carry over themes and repetition of vocabulary we noticed a movement from lament to thanksgiving in the psalm.

Our discussion on the New Testament usage of the psalm revealed that it was contextualized by the evangelists to suit their particular purpose. The gospel writers, particularly Mark, used the psalm to talk about the ironic message of the cross, death and the messianic kingship of Jesus. The New Testament usage of Psalm 22 also reveals that the passion of Christ has become a specific and concrete example of the exemplary and distressed individual and the psalm has the potential to address similar situations in other contexts.

In the Early Christian context Psalm 22 was interpreted with certain modes of interpretation like historical, allegorical, metaphorical and typological. Interpreters like Theodoret and Augustine explicate the content of the psalm christologically. Theodoret used the psalm to explain the historical events in the life of David and the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In addition to the Christological explanation of the Psalm Augustine used it as a platform for his contextualized polemic to address a particular issue of his Church.

Modern Christian exegetes Delitzsch and Menn treated the psalm working under the broad premise of Jewish-Christian relations. For them it is a Davidic psalm and its contents are concretely expressed in this light. The psalm above all achieves its significance because of its association with other exemplary individuals in Judaism and Christianity. The psalm thus speaks of a strong dynamic between an individual

and community in the context of distress and deliverance and it has an inherent potential to address any number of such contexts.

In our Dalit interpretations of Psalm 22 we identified three different interpretive modes applied to the psalm. First, Psalm 22 was interpreted in the context of the Hindu doctrine of karma and other scriptures, second, the psalm was read with the Dalit Christian women's point of view, and third, the psalm was contextualized in the light of a Dalit Christology. In each of these Dalit interpretations Psalm 22 stands as distinct in the light of the socio-economic and religious context in India.

All through our discussion in chapters 2-5 it was pointed out that the traditional biblical and Early Christian treatment of Psalm 22 would be taken as conversation/dialogue partners with a Christian Dalit interpretation discussed in chapters 6-9 (chapter 6 as a scene-setting for Dalit interpretation). The present chapter undertakes this task after briefly stating what we mean by dialogue or conversation in our endeavour to put the two interpretations in conversation with one another.

Francis Watson defines the concept of dialogue as a genuine conversation between two social worlds. Watson defines dialogue as "undistorted communication" in which "space is conceded to the other so that she or he may become not only a respondent to my questions but also an initiator who calls me to respond as well as to initiate."<sup>1</sup> This does not mean in the process of dialogue that we require "a self-abnegation in which the other is intended as superior ... for that would entail not only the abandonment of one's own individuality but also the abandonment of dialogue and a self-subjection to other's monologue ... Just as the other is to be ceded space within which to resist my communication ... so I must retain for myself the space which makes resistance possible."<sup>2</sup> Thus in the process of dialogue the reciprocity or equality of both sides is safeguarded.

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Watson, *Text, Church and World: Biblical interpretation in theological perspective* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 112.

In the above light the task of this chapter is: First, to examine the confluent factors in different interpretive contexts of Psalm 22; second, to show how different interpretive voices are helpful to serve as dialogue partners with the Christian Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22; third, to demonstrate how Dalit Christian interpretation, while having much in common with other interpretations of Psalm 22, see some new or unusual things in the psalm, which might enrich and challenge its dialogue partners; fourth, to propose different liberative hermeneutical models for an authentic and contemporary Dalit biblical interpretation.

## **10.1 Confluence of Interpretative Contexts of Psalm 22**

**10.1.1 Dialogical conversation of reading contexts of Psalm 22 with descriptive and constructive function:** At the outset it must be stated that the different reading contexts we discussed concerning Psalm 22 may be viewed with the following general theological understanding and principle: The God of the Old Testament, the God of the psalmist is the same God in the New Testament period and continues to work in diverse ways in the Early Church and in the Church through the ages, including the contemporary Dalit Christian context. With this affirmation we now move on to find out certain features from our discussion in chapters 2-5 and their dialogical purpose when they intersect with a Christian Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22. This is done for the purpose of achieving a concrete biblical meaning for authentic, normative and constructive purposes of interpreting faith communities.

Leo Perdue expresses a similar concern:

And it is through the many entrances into the various worlds of the Bible, through conversation with other experiences of the biblical stories, and through dialogues with cultures past and present that the believer's faith is constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed.<sup>3</sup>

Our interpretation of Psalm 22 began with its historical critical explanation. This speaks of the *descriptive function* of the psalm. Even in this probable reconstruction of the meaning of the psalm, an attempt was made to discern the meaning of the psalm within its historical context. Moreover the poetic structure of the psalm

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<sup>3</sup> Leo G. Perdue, *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology: After the Collapse of History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), p. 344.

indicated its flow of themes from lament to thanksgiving through certain transitional markers. This understanding of the psalm helps the modern reader like a Dalit reader to avoid a tendentious description according to their subjective whim.

We shall make the above point more clear with the help of one example both from Dalit and Early Christian contexts. In verse 17c of Psalm 22 the psalmist said “they dig through my hands and feet.” Out of many proposals we followed Franz Delitzsch’s proposal in chapter 2 (in our text-critical observation) that this may fit the situation of David in the sense that his hands and feet were tied up (pierced) by his enemies so he had no free movement. Many commentators and interpreters of the psalm through the ages took this verse as applicable to Jesus Christ on the cross. As noted in chapter 4 the Early Fathers like Augustine interpreted it in the same way. As discussed in chapter 9 the Dalit Christians too faithfully followed the tradition in this regard. But what is interesting is that in both contexts the meaning attributed to Psalm 22 was derived in plausible terms to valorize subjectivity. Augustine explains that Christ showed his disciple Thomas the marks of the nails and blow of the spear in his body and invited him to put his hand in them. Augustine goes on to say Thomas had indeed put his hand into the wounds. We noted in chapter 9 similar interpretation was carried out by a Christian Dalit Mādiga community in the context of their reflections on Psalm 22. Although it may be possible that such an interpretation on both the contexts was helpful to their argument, their aim and purpose may have led them to stretch their textual analysis too much. Even though such subjective interpretations cannot be avoided in contextual interpretations of Early and Dalit Christian readings, we need to note that such descriptions of the psalm are not supported by textual evidence. The New Testament does not mention Thomas putting his fingers in the wounds and scars of Jesus. Moreover the New Testament does not use the words of verse 17c of the psalm. The probable reason for this as many scholars noted was that the gospel writers may not have showed much interest in the details of the sufferings of Jesus on the cross as they were interested in God’s actions through him.<sup>4</sup> What we are arguing here is not that such readings are

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<sup>4</sup> C. S. Mann, *The Anchor Bible Mark* (New York: Doubleday, 1986), p. 644; Naomi Koltum-Fromm, “Psalm 22’s Christological Interpretive Tradition in the light of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic,” *JECS* 6: 1 (1998), p. 44.

impossible, but in this case it was overdone and historical critical reading of the text thus helps to maintain a caution on such ‘over-doing’ interpretations of the text. This should not lead us to think in terms of the historical-critical view of the text being ‘correct’ as this would lead us to play a role of ‘judging’ other contextual interpretations. This does not mean that there is one objective meaning of the text. It only puts a caution on certain readings like the ones discussed above to an extent that they are possibly ‘far-fetched’ interpretations.

If a biblical text is understood simply in terms of a text of antiquity it loses its dynamism. However a biblical text comes alive when “the visions of the contemporary culture (*in the sense of the contemporary application of a biblical text*) fuse with (*resonate or resemble*) the visions of the classic text (*in our case Psalm 22*).<sup>5</sup> This happens in the sense of fusion of horizons in a dialogical manner involving different contexts and those of the Bible.<sup>6</sup> These function and operate together, collaborating with one another, correcting one another, and mutually enriching one another in a way that produces new meanings in the ongoing interpretation of the Bible. This calls for a clear demonstration in the case of Psalm 22 with some examples from its interpretations based on historical critical, Early Christian and modern Christian interpretation from the west and put them in interaction with Christian Dalit interpretation.

10.1.2 The historical critical explanation of Psalm 22: In chapters 2 and 5 we examined the features of Psalm 22 on the basis of historical critical explanation. The form critical features and possible ritual context of the psalm were outlined to show how the psalm was possibly used in its historical context. As noted above certain features of the poetic description intensify the thematic and verbal action of the distress and deliverance expressed in the psalm. By means of poetic imagery and metaphors his acute pain and deliverance is explained by the psalmist. The structural

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<sup>5</sup> Leo Perdue, *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology*, p. 346. The words of emphasis in brackets are mine. See also Khiok-khng Yeo, “Culture and Intersubjectivity as criteria for negotiating meanings in cross-cultural interpretations,” in C. H. Cosgrove (ed) *The meaning we choose: hermeneutical ethics, indeterminacy and conflict of interpretations* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), pp. 81-100. Yeo used the term “rhetorical interaction” to explain the interaction between the text and the contemporary readers.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

features of the psalm shows how the psalm, in spite of its two discrete parts of lament and thanksgiving, is well knit together. By means of the transitional structural marker in verse 22 with a possible presence of salvation oracle or an oracle of rescue, the poet moves from lament to praise. Additionally the repetition of vocabulary, carry-over themes, and an overarching upswing of the themes of lament and praise speak of the psalm's inherent capacity as a powerful lament psalm.

The above features emerging out of the historical critical explanation of the psalm have been appropriated in Dalit Christian interpretations of the psalm. As stated in the introduction to the thesis, Dalit Christians under the influence of western traditional biblical scholarship have adopted some elements of historical critics. As described at several places in chapters 7-9 Dalits begin to understand Psalm 22 as a "psalm of David" composed at a time when he was persecuted by Saul. The two/three part structure is followed by Dalits in their interpretation. The movement from lament to praise between the two parts of the psalm is reiterated by Dalit interpretation. The presence of an oracle of salvation in verse 22 expressed by means of a phrase "you have answered me" is a timely boost for Dalits to appropriate the psalm's message as God's action of salvation as an answer to the cry of lament.<sup>7</sup> Thus the historical critical scholarship guided and provided an essential parameter in which Dalit interpretation of the psalm proceeded. Yet they significantly differ in their use of the psalm by not only embracing other modes from the New Testament and Early Christian interpretation but also on their own right. We shall demonstrate this from the sections that follow.

#### 10.1.3 The Christological movement in the entire Psalm 22 in different contextual readings:

As we noted in all the different contextual readings of Psalm 22 Christological reference is given to the psalm in the overwhelming number of cases. Christology as an interpretative mechanism was followed in most cases in interpreting the psalm. As noted in chapter 3 the New Testament writers, particularly Mark, appropriated the psalm for a specific purpose of explaining the point that Jesus

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<sup>7</sup> For instance in Text 2 – October 31, 2004 a Dalit preacher highlights on the issue of a transition from lament to thanksgiving in Psalm 22. The preacher affirms that Dalits can trust in God who changes their predicament into praise.



who died as the rejected one is also the king of Jews and expected messiah. Jesus' death as righteous and vindicated sufferer for many is also the concern of gospel writers in adopting the psalm in the New Testament. At the same time this suffering messiah and his vindication at the end in his resurrection comply with the thanksgiving section of the psalm. The New Testament use of the psalm is also viewed in the light of the prophecy of David about Christ. The use of Psalm 22 in the New Testament context provided a possibility that its meaning is concretized and specified towards its continued adaptation in the later period. The Christological reference became a profound point of departure and unity in the later readings of the psalm.

In the Early Christian context Psalm 22 takes a concrete shape in the light of its Christological understanding. Both Augustine and Theodoret followed Christology as an interpretative mechanism in their interpretation of Psalm 22. As discussed in chapter 4 Theodoret gives a strong support that the psalm foretells the events of Christ's passion and resurrection. Moreover Theodoret maintains that through the psalm we can notice the fact that Christ suffered and died for the salvation of the entire world. The psalm, Theodoret argues, fits perfectly with the life of David and those features of the life of David referred to in the psalm can be noticed in the passion and resurrection of Christ. Augustine interpreted Psalm 22 in the framework of *psalmus vox Christi* and *psalmus vox ecclesiae*. For him the psalm is about the passion and resurrection of Christ. Augustine maintains that similar use of the psalm can be seen in the case of New Testament writers. Augustine puts the psalm in the very voice of Christ in his first exposition. In his second exposition he takes up the explanation of the psalm in the light of his anti Donatist debate. For Augustine the Church as the body of Christ is the universal Church not limited to Africa alone. The salvation offered to the entire world or universal Church through Christ is the main thesis of Augustine in relation to Psalm 22. Christ is the redeemer of the entire world and thus the boundaries of the Church are universal and not limited to Africa alone.

As discussed in chapter 5 the modern Christian interpreters Delitzsch and Esther Menn saw the performance and function of Psalm 22 in its Christological interpretation. Delitzsch's Christological interpretation describes the psalm as the psalm of David and its meaning can only be fully realized in its subsequent

fulfilment in the passion of Jesus Christ. Thus the cross and resurrection of Christ are seen to correspond with the content of the psalm. Delitzsch argues that certain features in the psalm are related to the suffering of David but they are more specifically prophesied about Christ and are literally fulfilled in him. The cry of abandonment for instance, in verse 2 of the psalm in particular, stands unique in the case of Jesus Christ. Delitzsch finds a very close word to word parallel between verses 17c and 19 of the psalm with the words in the New Testament concerning Christ's cross. For Delitzsch some allusions to the resurrection of Christ can be found in the second part of the psalm. Working under the overall framework of Jewish conversion to Christianity Delitzsch affirms that the psalm is nothing but the prophecy of David about Christ. For Delitzsch both David and Christ are the mediators of the overall plan of God's salvation of the whole of humanity expressed in the psalm. David's words of prophecy in the psalm cannot be fully understood until they are seen in the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The modern Christian exegete Esther Menn is concerned about the identity of individual in the psalm as a starting point for a potential engagement between the ordinary individual and the psalm through its association with an exemplary individual—Jesus Christ. At a time when Jesus faced death and dark hours of despair on the cross Psalm 22 was put in his mouth. Menn observes that reading Psalm 22 in the light of Christ's death one gets the impression that the psalm was originally composed about him. The Christological reference in particular had a tremendous influence in later interpretations of the psalm in different contexts, just as the story of Jesus got a ritual setting within the New Testament. The psalm became the great passion psalm, proper as a scriptural reading during Holy Week, especially on Good Friday, to express Jesus' agony on the cross. The ritual history of the psalm was an indication that the psalm was used quite early in the Christian church (Augustine during the fourth century) in this way.

The two biblical scholars discussed above emphasize the robust performance of the psalm; it had a tremendous potential to be applied to other than its 'original' context. Their treatment of the psalm presupposes their genuine concern for either Jewish conversion or dialogue with Christianity. By putting the content of the psalm in the historical life of David and its subsequent fulfilment in the passion of Jesus Christ

Delitzsch sought to convert Jews to Christianity. By emphasizing the David as petitioning author of the psalm, Jesus Christ or Esther as the exemplary individuals whose stories of distress and deliverance sharpens the dynamism of the psalm Menn sought to foster a genuine Jewish-Christian dialogue. In any case both their treatment of Psalm 22 further opens up a possibility that other individuals and community experiences of distress and deliverance can also be addressed through the psalm. For such experiences Dalit Christian interpretation is one concrete example. Thus Delitzsch and Menn along with the other historical critics (discussed in chapters 2 and 3) and Early Christian interpreters serve as potential dialogue partners with Dalit Christians.

Like all other contexts we discussed above Christian Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22 is overwhelmingly done in the light of its Christological understanding. It is not an exaggeration to say that Psalm 22 may have been specifically composed for the Dalit Christian community as its content resonates with their situation and they view this in the light of its Christological understanding. The distress, humiliation, and even death described in the psalm and on the cross of Jesus Christ provide Christian Dalits with a concrete example to articulate their own suffering and God's salvation. As we discussed in several places in chapters 7-9 Christ's suffering and death on the cross and his resurrection are woven into the Dalit Christian interpretations of the psalm. Dalit Christians find a sense of worth and human dignity because of the ray of hope they received in the gospel message given to them. They affirm that in Christ their karmic lot is removed and a new personhood is given to them. Christ as the redeemer of the whole of humanity is a message that is particularly appealing to them.<sup>8</sup> As noted in chapters 7-9 the human dimension of Christ is the specific highlight of the Dalit Christological reference in relation to Psalm 22. The human Jesus is the one who empathises with the situation of Dalits. As argued in chapter 9 and elsewhere it is not only the servant and suffering model which stands dominant in the Dalit Christian appropriation of the psalm, but it is the protest model that complements their hopes and aspirations in understanding that God's justice will be executed and

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<sup>8</sup> Similar to the preaching of Augustine on the universal salvation of Christ to all human beings and thus the body of Christ is the entire world. See chapter 4 above for details.

their lament cry will be heard. Dalit Christians appropriate the cry of the psalmist via the cry of Jesus and his humiliation and mockery on the cross and also that their suffering is imposed on them by the unjust structures.

Dalit Christians seemed to have followed certain nuances of Christological interpretations found among the New Testament, early and modern Christian interpreters of Psalm 22. Christ as the redeemer of the entire world, the subsequent fulfilment of the words of the psalm in the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ and Christ's suffering as a paradigm for the suffering of countless distressed individuals are some of the specific nuances of Christology that are helpful for Dalit Christians as they read the psalm in dialogue with their western interpreters. At the same time their reading of the psalm stands distinct as they understand it in the light of the human suffering of Jesus Christ. We shall come back to this issue later in this chapter.

The Christological movement in Psalm 22 is pervasive in all different (except Jewish) reading contexts of Psalm 22. Jesus Christ as a type is prophesied in the psalm and this prophecy is said to have been fulfilled in the New Testament. The interpreters of the psalm seemed to have followed this path which began with the New Testament and continues up to the time of Dalit Christians. The meaning, significance, and the prominence of the psalm is in fact radically transformed as it moves from one stage to another because of its association with the passion and resurrection of Christ. Christological reference given to the psalm in all the interpretive contexts is an indication of the confluence of different interpretations for importing the message of God's liberative action in diverse contexts. Dalit Christians have no doubt to stand in line with their non-Dalit interpreters in adopting the Christology as a dominant interpretative mechanism for their reading of Psalm 22.

#### 10.1.4 Psalm 22 in the light of literal, allegorical, and metaphorical interpretations:

The different interpretive contexts of Psalm 22 discussed above follow various modes of treating the psalm and its content. In addition to the Christological interpretative mechanism discussed above the Dalit and non-Dalit readings followed certain common mechanisms of interpretation. However these common mechanisms carry specific nuances in each of the interpreters and we shall point out these

differences at appropriate places below. As noted in chapter 5 Delitzsch interprets the psalm in relation to David's life. In every verse David as a petitioning author of the psalm and his prophecy concerning Christ are crucial for Delitzsch. Some of the words or phrases used by Delitzsch like: "it is a Davidic Psalm belonging to the time when he was persecuted by Saul," "the whole Psalm as the words of David," "verse 17c applied to David," "first David," (used in comparison with Christ as second David) clarify his concern for a historical interpretation of the psalm. For Delitzsch "historical" means the life story of David and he understands the psalm in that light.

In an attempt to interpret the psalm literally (historical) Theodoret of Antiochene School in the Early Church explored the over all content of the psalm relating it to the "historical facts" of David's life. Although Theodoret saw this psalm as prophecy of Christ (a moderation of his stand as a pure literalist), he nevertheless located the content in the life of David. Just like Delitzsch Theodoret understands "historical" (literal) in the sense of David's life story. Dalit Christians follow the same trend while explaining the historical background of the psalm. On several occasions Dalit preachers used the words: "Psalm 22 is written by David in his situation of trials and sufferings"; "Psalm 22 is the experience of David when he was pursued by King Saul"; "Psalm 22 was written by David and it shows his humble nature<sup>9</sup> despite being a king of a nation"; Since it was common to traditionally think of David as the author of the psalm, ascribing a particular historical situation to the psalm was an easy next step.

The allegorical and metaphorical interpretations were dominant in most of the interpretive contexts of the psalm we discussed in this thesis. The reason for this is that the nature of the language used in the psalm was kept open to different possibilities. As already noted in chapter 2 the precise nature of the distress suffered by the individual in the psalm can be construed to refer to various possibilities due to the metaphorical language used in the psalm. It was noted that among several possibilities the distress of the psalmist may be due to some mental and psychological disturbance, real sickness, social ostracism, or even demon possession.

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<sup>9</sup> In one discussion group (Reflections and Commentary 6 – November 14, 2004) this view was contested but not accepted by the majority of the members.



The Early Christian interpreters overwhelmingly dwelt on the allegorical interpretation of Psalm 22. Of course their allegorical reading of the text comes very much from the selected pieces of the biblical text. Moreover their allegorization seems to have uprooted the cultural moorings of the texts.<sup>10</sup> For instance, Augustine allegorizes the psalm in relation to the universal Church. He allegorizes the physical symptoms of the body described in the psalm in verses 1, 14, and 20 as nothing but the concerns related to the Church as the body of Christ. Again in verse 9 the words “womb” and “breasts” are allegorized as womb of the Virgin, Jewish nation; Virgin’s breasts and the breasts of the Synagogue. In the case of Dalit Christians we see similar trends when they interpret Psalm 22. Just like the Early Fathers Dalits allegorize the psalm by picking up some selected words. In one particular reflection it was understood that the word “congregation” in verse 23 of the psalm meant their local parish for the overwhelming majority of Dalit Christians.<sup>11</sup> In other places the word “poor” in verse 26 of the psalm is allegorized to refer to Dalit Christians as the inheritors of God’s promise as indicated in the verse.<sup>12</sup> Of course this way of allegorizing the words in the psalm can also be viewed positively in relation to the readers the psalm addressed.

The metaphors and images described in the psalm are much more helpful for a contextual explanation of the psalm. But these metaphors and images carry specific nuances in each case of their application. P. W. Macky is of the view that “metaphors are not words but rather speech acts in which an author/speaker employs words in metaphorical way and to a particular end, namely the intention of getting over his or her meaning, what Macky calls the ‘speaker’s meaning’ to his or her audience.”<sup>13</sup> In the case of Psalm 22 we are no longer sure of what this ‘speaker’s meaning’ was in the original setting. The contextual interpreters appropriated the metaphors of Psalm

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<sup>10</sup> For more details on this discussion see James Barr, “The literal, the allegorical, and modern biblical scholarship,” *JSOT* 44 (1989), pp. 3-17. Barr is of the view that the early and mediaeval allegory was largely de-contextualizing the biblical text.

<sup>11</sup> Reflection and Commentary 3 – November 14, 2004,

<sup>12</sup> Text 7 – November 21, 2004 and Reflection 8 – November 25, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> The views of Peter W. Macky, *The centrality of metaphors to biblical thought: a model for interpreting the Bible* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1990), pp. 8-25 summarized in Brian Doyle, “Howling like dogs: metaphorical language in Psalm LIX,” *VT* 54: 1 (2004), p. 69.



22 in a way that speak for their audience. As discussed in chapter 3 the reader of the gospels in the New Testament has provided Psalm 22 as an interpretative clue to see who the sufferer is on the cross. This happened because the appropriation of the psalm in the New Testament and the metaphorical nature of the psalm allow it to be making concrete and relevant to the life of Jesus Christ. In the Early Christian interpretation we see a similar process. But for them the metaphors carry some specific nuances. Theodoret would equate “bulls” “young and fat bulls” with the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees during the time of Jesus. Theodoret explains the metaphors “bulls” and “dogs” in verses 12-13 and 16 in relation to Jews and Gentiles. The Gentiles as impure “dogs” became sons of God through faith and the Jews became “dogs” by their very raging against God.<sup>14</sup> Augustine relates “worm” to Christ because of his mortal nature, born of flesh and born without “coition.” Dalit Christians also readily appropriate the metaphors used in the psalm while describing the attitude of high caste people towards them and also in relation to their high caste oppressors. Unlike their non-Dalit partners their appropriation of the metaphors are contextualized as per the needs of their community. They often relate “cows of Bashan” described in verse 12 of the psalm with that of high caste oppressors, and landlords. The high caste political leaders who make the life of Dalits miserable in their day to day life are addressed as “wild dogs.”<sup>15</sup> When Dalits describe the attitude of high caste people they regret that terms like “dogs” and “pigs” are employed on them as derogatory remarks.<sup>16</sup> Different from Augustine’s understanding of “worms” Dalit Christians feel that they are crushed like “worms” by their high caste oppressors.<sup>17</sup>

As already pointed out in chapter 4 Theodoret’s explanation of “bulls” and “dogs” though not done with a view to point out the cultural differences between Jews and Gentiles nevertheless help Dalit Christians in their metaphorical explanation of the

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<sup>14</sup> *Theodoret of Cyrus: Commentary on the Psalms 1-72*, pp. 149-50.

<sup>15</sup> Text 4 – November 4, 2004, Text 7 – November 21, 2004 and Reflection 4 – November 25, 2004.

<sup>16</sup> Reflection and Commentary 7 – November 14, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Text 9 – November 28, 2004.

psalm. Dalits addressed as “dogs” by their caste oppressors are nonetheless made as children of God by the very sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

By using the metaphors of the psalm different contextual interpreters demonstrate their closeness and concreteness with one another for the appropriation of the message of the psalm. Even though we can identify specific nuances in the use of metaphors between Dalit and non-Dalit interpreters, a Dalit Christian interpretation of Psalm 22 comes closer to the Early Christian and modern Christian interpretations by adopting some of their interpretative mechanisms. As noted in this section this closeness is visible in the interpretation of Psalm 22 with literal or historical, allegorical and metaphorical hermeneutical methods.

10.1.5 Lament and thanksgiving as concrete resources for an authentic Christian Dalit resonance with Psalm 22: Psalm 22 achieves a tremendous significance by virtue of its lament genre. Its profound message is communicated through different contextual interpretations on the basis of lament as something very fundamental or at the heart of the Christian message. Walter Brueggemann in his article, “The Costly Loss of Lament” describes how the Church in the West on the whole lost the importance of giving priority to the lament. Brueggemann maintains that because of this no critical questions are raised and the unjust systems continue to exist. This creates a sense of “False Self” that God must always be praised and not confronted; consequently no justice questions may be raised.<sup>18</sup> As we explained in chapter 2 the historical and rhetorical critical interpretations of the psalm takes up the lament genre through its explanation. The first twenty two verses of the psalm outlined the lament theme. Through carefully measured lines and structure the lament of the psalm is expressed by the poet. By the transitional marker, carry over themes, repetition of vocabulary and by the overarching upswing of the themes of lament and thanksgiving the psalm’s meaning is effectively articulated by the poet. We agree with Westermann that the praise is the consequence of lament and lament mostly ends in this way in the psalms.<sup>19</sup> As noted in chapter 5 Delitzsch argued in Psalm 22 the lament and thanksgiving are the two corresponding elements in relation to the

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<sup>18</sup> For details on this discussion see Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the life of Faith*, pp. 98-111.

<sup>19</sup> Westermann, *The Praise of God in the Psalms*, pp. 74-75.

cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For Delitzsch a psalm of “disconsolate shriek of anguish” becomes a cry with “full of trust” and ends in “vows of thanksgiving” as a result of God’s deliverance of the suffering one. This sort of movement from lament to praise is also followed in the case of Early Christian interpretations of Psalm 22. For Theodoret and Augustine the psalm contains the themes of Christ’s passion and resurrection that correspond with the themes of lament and praise. For Theodoret darkness and dawn are comparable to the lament and thanksgiving and in correspondence with cross and resurrection. Augustine, while preaching on the psalm on Good Friday, reminds his audience about the integral link between the passion and resurrection of Christ as occasions of sorrow and celebration.<sup>20</sup>

Christian Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22 follows the lament-praise and cross-resurrection pattern. Christian Dalit women found the lament dimension of the psalm a potential religious and theological resource to articulate their grief and agony both in the light of the psalm’s content and also in relation to Christ’s suffering on the cross and his resurrection. As discussed in chapter 8 for Christian Dalit women lament is very helpful as it takes different forms in resonance with their situation. Lament as protest, dereliction and solace are some of the concrete ways in which Dalit women articulate their faith in God. At the same time their situation of oppression will not remain the same as they see the hope in the second part of the psalm and in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Certain words<sup>21</sup> like: “we are treated like worms”, “we cry to God”, “where are you God?”, “why have you ‘betrayed’ me?” convey the intense lament cry of Dalits. At the same time they express a profound hope and thanksgiving in words like “we have Christ as an example”, “we sing a song of redemptive suffering”, and “I am not left at the death cry of sheol by God.” Dalit Christians affirm suffering and glory as inseparable parts of the psalm concretely seen in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That God will eventually vindicate their cause and punish their oppressors is the hope they read in the psalm.

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<sup>20</sup> St. Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, pp. 149-50.

<sup>21</sup> The words are quoted from the sermons of Dalit Christians on Psalm 22 in Text 5 – November 5, 2004, Text 9 – November 28, 2004, Reflection 1 in Text and Commentary 10 – November 28, 2004.

10.1.6 New Testament use of Psalm 22 and its relevance to Dalit interpretation: Dalit interpretation understands Psalm 22 in the light of its New Testament usage. For Dalits the psalm is significant because it is tied up with Jesus Christ. They find solidarity and resonance in the psalm through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Like the other interpreters of the critical and precritical period Dalit Christians believe that the psalm is a prophecy of David about the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Certain features of the New Testament use of the psalm discussed in chapter 3 above such as: Jesus as righteous and vindicated suffering messiah, the mockery and insult of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection as victory for the cause he suffered, are some of the relevant points for Dalit appropriation of the psalm. The suffering of the psalmist and the suffering of Christ are viewed in the same light by Dalits. But the suffering of Christ is much more profound and relevant for their situation. If Christ was mocked and insulted on the cross as was the psalmist, they too find such dehumanizing situations of mockery and insult in their daily lives. Words<sup>22</sup> like: “Jesus suffered outside the camp”, “Christ was mocked on the cross”, “we as Christian Dalits are always mocked by the caste people because of our birth and vocation” express the pain and agony of Dalits. The suffering messiah is identified by Dalits as one among them. Jesus suffered as the human being and Servant of God. He took Dalits’ oppression and pain upon him and laid down his life on the cross to redeem them. Dalits express these views in the words<sup>23</sup>: “Jesus Christ is a servant God, a Dalit God” (an expression of several Dalit theologians, for instance see Arvind Nirmal in chapter 9 notes 4 and 5), “Jesus as a suffering messiah is one among us”, “Jesus was persecuted and suffered for my sake.” At the same time through his resurrection he vindicates their cause and brings justice by acting against their oppressors. Some of the expressions<sup>24</sup> Dalits use in this regard: “In the resurrection of Jesus we experience hope and new life”; “we have hope in the might and power of the resurrection of Christ.” As already pointed out in chapter 3 the

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<sup>22</sup> Words of Dalit sermons quoted in this section are from Text 1 – October 24, 2004, Text 11 – December 5, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Quotes are from Text 2 – October 31, 2004, Text 3 – November 2, 2004.

<sup>24</sup> Quotes are from Text 1 – October 24, 2004, Text 2 – October 31, 2004, Text 11 – December 5, 2004.

reader of the psalm is invited to see the passion and resurrection of Christ as a concrete example of distress and deliverance and such examples may be found in other contexts. On this count a Dalit reading of the psalm becomes one concrete example of Psalm 22.

Thus the Dalit interpretations of Psalm 22 make use of the New Testament references of the psalm in such a way that the psalm becomes profound and meaningful to their present distress and deliverance since it was related to the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

10.1.7 Dalit women's interpretation of Psalm 22 in resonance with biblical women's struggle: As discussed in chapter 8 Dalit Christian women's interpretation of the psalm plays a significant role as it explains their concrete situation. In chapter 5 we showed that in the history of interpretation of Psalm 22, the biblical figure Esther is associated with the psalm. According to *Midrash Tehillim* the plight of the Jewish nation is behind the story although the personal plight of the queen is the immediate concern in the entire description. As already discussed, Esther Menn presents the details of how Psalm 22 was put in the voice of the queen to describe her duress. The interpretation of Psalm 22 on the basis of *Midrash Tehillim* conveys the point that Queen Esther emerges as an extraordinary individual who communicates her distress at a pivotal moment of national and personal crisis and salvation. According to *Midrash Tehillim* 22.16 Esther prays to God by reporting her personal distress as something terrible compared to other matriarchs in history. As already noted Menn observes that the Esther story according to *Midrash Tehillim* is an idiosyncratic narrative and the distinctive expressions and language of Psalm 22 become so intertwined in this Jewish source that it might well appear as if the psalm were originally composed about the unique situation of Esther.

Viewed in this light the Dalit women's voice becomes not only significant but distinct in the overall Dalit Christian interpretation of Psalm 22. Dalit women look at their situation in the light of and with the help of Psalm 22. As discussed in chapter 8 Dalit women reread Psalm 22 with critical suspicion. They were not allowed (at least they understood it traditionally) to take part in the Holy Communion services on the days of their menstrual cycle, but they now reflect on the psalm with the view that

this was unduly 'imposed' on them. The dalitness of Jesus reflected through the psalm is more than sufficient to seek their solidarity with Jesus in their present struggle—even from the male imposed customs in the Church and society. That is why problems like domestic violence, abandonment by their husbands, oppression using certain Hindu scriptures all find their 'solution' in the humanness of Jesus reflected through the psalm. The religious and theological dimension of the lament in the psalm is of great help and resource for Christian Dalit women in their reflective process. When Esther in the *Midrash Tehillim* represents her Jewish nation she speaks for the rights and the aspirations of her people. She recalls God's past salvific deeds and establishes her firm hope that God is able to deliver her people and the nation. As noted above in *Midrash Tehillim* 22.16 Esther recalls how her fortune is inversely opposed to the other matriarchs in history. The Christian Dalit women are working and reflecting with the psalm in the same ambit. As already noted Dalit Christian women are thrice alienated because of caste, gender and church. It is in this terrible distress that Psalm 22 becomes most compelling biblical text for Dalit Christian women.

## **10.2 Distinctive Features in the Dalit Interpretation of Psalm 22**

As argued from chapters 7-9 Dalit Christians contextualized Psalm 22 in the context of their own socio-political and religious situation. In the context dominated by Hindu religious tradition, under the influence of Hindu doctrine of karma and under the impact of caste system and related issues, Dalit Christians appropriated the psalm for their liberation and emancipation. As discussed in chapter 7 the law of karma was imposed on the Christian Dalits by their high caste people based on certain Hindu scriptures. Dalit Christians are given a hope and assurance that their karmic lot was wiped out by the death of Christ and they are set free as individuals removed from the guilt of karma. Christ's dalitness is sufficient for them to find their solidarity in a God who identifies with them and at the same time transcends all class and caste barriers. The high caste interpreters of twentieth century Indian Christian theology like Vengal Chakkarai (as a non-Dalit dialogue partner) in his interpretation of Psalm 22 stand in correspondence with Dalit Christians by offering an additional support that the divine *śakti* (power) of the cross of Christ can transform and empower the Christian Dalits.



In the light of our discussion in chapter 8 Dalit women find a resonance in Psalm 22 with their own point of view as they read and appropriate it. They find that the situation of the psalmist and Christ moving through distress and agony to victory is in perfect consonance with their present condition. At the same time Dalit Christians affirm that their dalitness is not a sign of their weakness rather it is through the resistance and protest cry 'implied' in the psalm that they affirm their identity as people of God. They think of lament as a protest cry and as a genuine dialogue between God and the lamenter so that God would act and restore the situation of the lamenter by acting fast against the oppressors of the lamenter.

As in the earlier interpretive contexts Dalit Christian interpretation of Psalm 22 radicalizes the meaning of the psalm for their own application. Psalm 22 becomes very prominent in the Dalit Christian biblical hermeneutics as it constructively engages them in more complex ways as discussed above. As this discussion reveals that the precritical and historical-literary critical modes of interpretations had their obvious impact on a Dalit Christian interpretation of Psalm 22, yet in some respects it stands distinct given the difference in Dalit Christian interpretive context. This distinctiveness is first of all seen very clearly in terms of its context and method. While it is obvious that the Dalit Christian interpretation 'borrowed' its methodological tools from its earlier interpretive contexts, nevertheless it focuses on a reader centred approach for transformative action that will result in the liberation from their dehumanized situation. As stated in chapter 1 the limited use of historical and literary or text and author centred approaches in the present Dalit Christian Indian interpretation cannot be avoided because so many writers come from a western oriented seminary and theological education. At the same time the interpretation of Psalm 22 by Christian Dalits moves beyond the restrictions set by the historical criticism in terms of time and space and expands its frame of interpretation.<sup>25</sup> This is clearly demonstrated the very way in which Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22 takes other dialogue partners like the New Testament, Early Christian and contemporary Christian biblical scholars to dialogue with them

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Kim Micah Eun-Kyu, "A New Approach to Biblical Criticism: Spiritual Interpretation," *AJT* 19: 2 (2005), pp. 241-255.

and finds them useful at several points and express their solidarity in the interpretive process. At the same time as this study reveals Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22 does not merely see a biblical text as a literary piece as was largely done by historic critics, but moves beyond to find resonance with human emotions, sharing pain and anguish caused by their oppressors, and at the same time the experience of deliverance in a God who vindicates their cause to punish their oppressors. This way of reading a biblical text by the Dalit Christians also challenges the 'dominant' role played by the historical critical approach for several decades in India. Moreover by using the historical critical methodology to a minimum and focusing on a reader centred approach with texts like Psalm 22 Dalit Christian reading motivated them for appropriating the message of the psalm for their liberation in a persistent and sincere way. For Dalits the biblical text is at the centre of their life both in the world and in their Church. The text, Church and world are therefore related to one another as three concentric circles. Biblical text is placed in the innermost circle, is located within Church, and the Church is located within the world, the outermost circle.<sup>26</sup> These three are integrally related to one another. Dalits look at the Bible in the light of their problems faced in this world and Church. Their hermeneutical practice of Psalm 22 should be seen in this light. What we are arguing in effect here does not amount to denigrating text-author centred methods but shows how the reader centred method works much better in the case of Christian Dalit contextual interpretation of the Bible.<sup>27</sup>

It is beyond any doubt that the historical critical treatment of the psalm guided and helped Dalits to understand certain features of the psalm like the structure and significance of certain words and phrases. The New Testament, Early and modern Christian hermeneutical modes of treating Psalm 22 is certainly helpful for Dalits in their treatment of the psalm. As already noted above the reading of the psalm in the light of the prophecy of David about Christ, Christ's salvation to the entire humanity, David as a petitioning author of the psalm, allegorizing the words in the psalm as

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<sup>26</sup> Watson, *Text, Church and World*, p. 11. For a similar use of the psalm see the exposition of Augustine on Psalm 22 in chapter 4 above.

individuals of their contemporary age, use of metaphors in the psalm for contemporary application, and even providing a case of improvised reading (as noted in the case of Augustine in chapter 4 in relation to verse 17c) are some of the interpretative mechanisms that help Dalit Christians as they carried out their reading of the psalm. In this sense Dalits share lot of common things with their non-Dalit partners. But Dalits move beyond the mere use of critical and hermeneutical insights from its non-Dalit partners to a point where their context determines the answers they seek from the text and vice versa.

The conversation we initiated and carried out between the Dalit Christian and other historical critical and Early Christian interpretations of Psalm 22 not only speak of converging features of interpretation but also of few distinctive features in the way that Dalit Christian interpretation sees the psalm in a different light from all the others. We shall point out these features in the discussion that follows.

As noted above it was under the pervasive influence of Hindu karma theory (that legitimizes caste system) that Dalit Christians interpreted Psalm 22. The law of karma imposes an undue burden on Dalits in that it is their karma to suffer as low caste human beings. Certain Hindu scriptures were used in this regard to justify karma and caste. Dalit Christians seem to have been resigned to this view until they received a Christian interpretation of the psalm that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ removed their karmic lot and they are therefore freed from this bondage. The message that Christ has redeemed them from all their sins gave them a sense of worth and human dignity. This way of reading Psalm 22 in the light of the Hindu karma theory is unique and distinct for a Christian Dalit interpretation.

Lament as an important theological resource is emphasized in all the Dalit interpretations of Psalm 22. When Dalit Christians are uprooted and marginalized in and around the society in which they live, when their oppressors impose certain traditional values to demean their social and religious status the lament helps them in a concrete way. Lament expressed by the Dalit Christians takes the form of their genuine protest and anger expressed against the oppressive system. It also indicates

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<sup>27</sup> For a similar kind proposal see note 11 and 12 in chapter 1. Like Arul Raja we would argue that the reader centred approach can achieve better if it works in conversation with the historical critical approach as our Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22 demonstrates.

that they do not always internalize their suffering but rather take up a genuine dialogue with their God who can vindicate their cause. Some of the phrases<sup>28</sup> like: “we are not worms destined to be crushed under the foot of our oppressors”, “Why have you forsaken me?” and “how long do we have to suffer?” reflect Dalit anger and protest against their God and oppressor. As explained in chapter 9 Christ as a drum and drum player gives them a sense of solidarity to express their resistance against their oppressive system. At the same time for Dalits the lament as dereliction finds its full solidarity in the very cry of dereliction of the psalmist and Jesus on the cross. In times of extreme pain and anguish lament comes to them as solace and comfort to their troubled hearts. This overall emphasis on the lament motif expressed in the entire psalm is appropriated by Dalits in the midst of their socio-economic and religious situation. Faced with caste and class discrimination, subjected to the condition of poverty and low self esteem Dalit Christians made use of the lament motif in the psalm in a more profound way than all other dialogue partners we discussed in this thesis. For the western Christian and Early Christian interpretations lament belong to academic discussion and it appears as impersonal to a large extent. But for Dalits lament is very much a personal cry and they find solidarity for their situation in the psalmist’s and Jesus’ cry on the cross. This is one of the different ways in which Dalit Christians approach the psalm to exploit the full potential of the positive dimension of a biblical lament.

As already discussed in this chapter Christological interpretations and application were overwhelmingly found in the Early Christian and other modern biblical scholars’ interpretation of Psalm 22. In these interpretations, among other things, it was emphasized that the lament and thanksgiving of the psalm is concretized in the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As already discussed Dalit Christian interpretation looks at the psalm in the same light. But for Dalits one specific aspect of Christology is more important and relevant. It is the image of the human Jesus that is more appealing than the divinity of Christ. The human Jesus can empathise with their situation and it is in dalitness that Jesus expresses a profound solidarity with them. Some of their expressions like Jesus as “disfigured one on the cross”, Jesus as

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<sup>28</sup> Text 9 – November 28, 2004 and Reflection 1 in Text and Commentary 10 – November 28, 2004.

“suffering servant and messiah as the one among Dalits”, Jesus as “the broken and crushed and died”<sup>29</sup> are an indication of Dalits strong appeal and hope in the dalitness of Jesus. Jesus as the incarnate messiah is more appropriate for Dalit Christians as they interpret Psalm 22. Although on certain occasions Early Christian interpreters (as in the case of Theodoret and Augustine in chapter 4) make some passing comments on the human suffering of Jesus, none of the modern and Early Christian interpretations highlight this dimension of the psalm so clearly and concretely. It is obvious that these non-Dalit interpreters are living in ‘comfortable and safe’ zones in their socio-economic milieu. But for Dalit Christians under the constant threat of facing their oppressor in daily life, the concept of suffering of the psalmist and dalitness of Jesus is more valuable than their dialogue partners. The psalm, for Christian Dalits, is real and invaluable as they face abuse, humiliation and even death.

For Dalit women Psalm 22 becomes a source of identity, solidarity and hope in their present struggle. As discussed in chapter 8 Christian Dalit women’s struggle is unique in several respects even while they share certain common features of oppression with other Dalit men and non-Dalit women. They are thrice alienated due to gender, caste and class. They suffer not only because they are women, but also are targeted by the high caste men as Dalit women. They are systematically oppressed using the Hindu scriptures. They are the Dalits among Dalits. In such a precarious condition Christian Dalit women see a tremendous solace and solidarity from reflecting on the plight of the psalmist and looking at the cross and resurrection of Christ through the psalm. As discussed in chapter 8 above Dalit women utilize this potential in their reflection of the psalm. None of the non-Dalit interpreters understood the psalm in this way. We discussed in chapter 5 that Esther Menn refers to a particular use of the psalm in the light of the biblical story of Esther in Rabbinic Judaism. Even in that reference the psalm was not related to the context of the interpreter. In the case of Dalit women the psalm is profound and concrete since it is connected to their very life and death situations.

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<sup>29</sup> See chapter 9 above for the details.

While it is true that the Dalit Christian interpretation of Psalm 22 share much in common with its dialogue partners in terms of certain common interpretive mechanisms, nevertheless it differs from all of them in terms of emphasizing features of the psalm that address their life-threatening situation. The psalm also generates a profound hope and victory as they seek God's vindication of their cause for liberation from the oppressive and dehumanizing condition. Thus their interpretative tools are unique and distinct even while they share certain features with their western and Early Christian interpreters of Psalm 22. On this basis we shall present a few models of Dalit hermeneutics emerging out of our overall discussion in this thesis.

### **10.3 Towards a Dalit Liberative Hermeneutics: A Proposal**

In the previous section we argued that all of the interpretive contexts of Psalm 22 stand in connection by way of impacting one another in the process of interpretation. As pointed out above by now it is clear that the Christian Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22 inherits some common interpretive mechanisms from its earlier period and at the same time stands distinct on its own. In this light we propose some hermeneutical models for an authentic Dalit liberative biblical interpretation emerging out of our research. These function in relation to one another and are not to be supposed as exhaustive. There may be other hermeneutical models that we have not dealt with here. But we suppose these are the important ones based on our research.

10.3.1 *Hermeneutics of liberative transformation*: Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22 is aimed at effecting God's liberative action in Dalits towards their emancipation. Biblical hermeneutics in the past in the name of objectivity promoted the maintenance of status quo. This was the case with the historical critical methodology in a broader sense. But our discussion even refutes that general idea. In the case of Psalm 22 the form and rhetorical critical interpretation is carried out with the nuance that God's liberative action is certain in the midst of the distress and agony expressed in the psalm. Dalit interpretation also shares a similar nuance of God's liberative



transformation. In that sense both these contextual readings are very much subjective.<sup>30</sup>

Although Dalit hermeneutes are somewhat influenced by the western mode of theological education and interpretation, their hermeneutics on Psalm 22 are worked out in collaboration and conversation with the earlier interpretive modes in different contexts. In this process they point towards a liberative and transformative hermeneutics. This liberation is from all kinds of caste oppression and transformation is based on the hope that God is on their side. The reader centred approach of Dalit Christians work in consonance with the author and text centred historical critical approach in this process as we argued in the case of Psalm 22. More particularly for Dalit Christians Psalm 22 functions as a 'Canon' to fight against injustices imposed on them by their high caste oppressors. As noted above Psalm 22 serves as an important biblical resource for Dalits at times of agony and distress. They value and cherish the content of the psalm not simply because it resonates with their condition but they see God's vindication of those who are subjected to pain and agony and they can seek a genuine dialogue (in the sense of protest) with God for this purpose. For Dalit Christians Psalm 22 can help transform their present condition of suffering to a liberating experience. Even in such cases where the Dalit Christian interpretation is overdone with 'hermeneutics of respect' and exhibits the fluidity of interpretation, it serves the purpose of affirming their identity in a positive sense as against the social stigma attached by the high caste communities.<sup>31</sup> Dalits along with the psalmist affirm that Yahweh hears the cry of the oppressed lamenter and executes justice by way of deliverance. This assures the victimised Dalit Christians a new hope of transformation.<sup>32</sup> In this sense their cry is not a meaningless one but with full of hope for a change and transformation towards the formation of a just society.

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<sup>30</sup> See M. Gnanavaram, "Hermeneutical Issues in Dalit Theology," *AJTR* 11: 1-2 (1998), pp. 118-129. Gnanavaram argues that the historical critical interpretation of the Bible in the name of objectivity leads to oppressive hermeneutics that serves to maintain the status quo. But our interpretation of Psalm 22 using form and rhetorical methods instead helps to further set the psalm open to liberative hermeneutics like Dalit interpretation.

<sup>31</sup> See chapter 9 above for the details of this discussion. See also Sathianathan Clarke, "Viewing the Bible," pp. 245-66.

<sup>32</sup> See for details of discussion on this point Muthunayagam, "Biblical Hermeneutics," pp. 7-10.

10.3.2 *Hermeneutics of protest and action*: The lament psalms like Psalm 22 speak in the language of protest in response to acute suffering. The laments are not necessarily negative but have positive functions. The lament appeals to God for his intervention and positive change. The cry of the psalmist in Psalm 22 is a genuine cry of the oppressed lamenter and when Dalits read it they too identify it with their cry. "The outcry of the psalmist in the past is re-effectuated in the present and they are motivated to confront their God directly and energize their faith in God and affirm their identity."<sup>33</sup> Moreover the lament cry addressed to God seeks to enter into an intense dialogue with God in order to evoke God's response to the cry of the lamenter. Dalit Christians cry out to their God "in anticipation with and in the light of liberative potential that may ultimately come from God."<sup>34</sup> In this process the lament prayer of the petitioner is taken seriously by God that the lamenter's prayer is valued and heard and God's justice is implemented. Brueggemann calls this process as "redress of power."<sup>35</sup> The protest cry thus leads to action that results in a change from the present situation of the psalmist.

As noted above in chapters 8 and 9 Dalit Christians read Psalm 22 with a similar focus. Dalit Christians do not simply internalize their oppression and suffering. They seek God's intervention against their oppressors in a caste ridden society. They cry in such a way that God's silence may be broken and his help activated. The protest cry would effect change from a period of inactivity to an active involvement of God for their cause. The protest cry for Christian Dalits helps to assert their lost identity as they engage in dialogue with their God in this process. Dalits through their protest cry also want to show their high caste oppressors that their God is in solidarity with them and that he will act on their behalf to vindicate their just cause. As already demonstrated in chapter 7 Dalit Christians question the undue imposition of karma theory and caste hierarchy based on certain Hindu texts and affirm that in Christ their karma is removed and that they are not 'inferior' as labelled by their high caste oppressors. Thus Dalit protest challenges all the oppressive structures that work

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 17.

<sup>34</sup> Jesurathnam, "Towards a Dalit liberative hermeneutics." p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> See note 47 in chapter 9 above.

against their liberation and emancipation. In this sense it is a prophetic hermeneutics “challenging the priestly oppressive values.”<sup>36</sup>

10.3.3 *Hermeneutics of suspicion*: As argued in chapter 8 critical suspicion of the text was carried out in the case of Christian Dalit women as they reread the psalm with that strategy. Certain traditional customs imposed on them both as women and as a Dalit women necessitated reading the psalm with a critical suspicion to confirm that they are not inferior or impure in the way as they are labelled by their high caste oppressors. Dalit Christian women approach Psalm 22 with their day to day problems in order that they may find certain answers in the text. Then they compare their situation with that of the psalmist and subsequently with Christ and are assured that their plight is something imposed on them by a male bias and that they find both resonance of their situation with the text as well as promise that God is in solidarity with them in their present crises. They address their critical questions to God with the word “why?” along with the psalmist and find that the psalmist and Jesus have previously experienced the same dalitness. This way of reading the psalm opens new vistas as Dalit Christian women deconstruct certain notions based on the ‘false’ and imposed customs of Indian social and religious life.

As discussed in chapter 8 Dalit Christian women also read the Hindu scriptures that promote their inferior status with critical suspicion and reject such Hindu scriptures outright. Those Hindu texts that justify the caste system are also rejected by Dalit Christian women. While the inferior status of all the women is legitimized by Hindu scriptures, in the case of Dalit women the rules are more particularly imposed. Thus the critical and suspicious reading of texts help Dalit Christians to fight against certain traditional values imposed on them.

10.3.4 *Hermeneutics of identity*: The interpretation of Psalm 22 gives the Christian Dalits a sense of identity they have been robbed off for several centuries. It gives them strength to find their identity with self-respect. The Christian Dalits like all other Dalits have been injected with the feeling of low self esteem and they had always lived with the sense of guilt about having karma from previous or present

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<sup>36</sup> Gnanavaram, “Hermeneutical Issues.” p. 122.

births. As argued in chapter 7 and in other places this situation has been subjected to change when Dalits read the psalm with the view that their dignity and worth as persons has an integral relationship with what God had done to them in Jesus Christ. Their self-identity and self-worth as God's children is assured as they read and appropriate the psalm. Dalit Christians, looking at the plight of the psalmist and his subsequent deliverance by God are of the view that their cry is heard in a similar way and God in Jesus Christ assures them of similar deliverance. For this sort of consciousness and identity Psalm 22 serves as a catalyst. At the same time this identity and consciousness should not become a narrow communal identity. As argued in chapter 7 Dalit Christian interpretation of the Bible should benefit a great deal from the nineteenth and twentieth century Indian Christian theological enterprise by way of accepting certain elements that enhance and affirm life for all, transcending ethnic and caste barriers.<sup>37</sup>

*10.3.5 Hermeneutics of empowerment:* Christian Dalits are made powerless by the oppressive system. The Christian Church in India is divided on the basis of caste and Dalits are marginalized in this process even though they are numerically dominant. As argued in chapters 7-9 by reading Psalm 22 the Dalit Christians are empowered as they find God's solidarity with them in their dalitness. Because of this solidarity they fight against oppressive and dehumanizing structures that work against them. Dalit Christians are empowered with the religious and theological resources. Lament as a positive resource helps them to organise their struggle. Their protest cry is raised in consonance with the psalmist for God's speedy intervention and action. They are empowered in their powerlessness just as God empowered the psalmist in his dalitness and Christ's dalitness itself is a theological resource for Dalit Christians in the process of empowerment. By interpreting Psalm 22 Dalit Christians are made to be aware that their suffering is not God given and they also realize that the oppressive structures are created by their oppressors and they no longer tolerate such discriminating attitudes. Dalits are empowered to fight against those who control and dominate the power structures that kept Dalits as marginalized community. Through the empowerment Dalit Christians understand that God is on their side empathizing

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Samuel Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion*, pp. 341-44.

and vindicate their cause. Dalit Christians by their reading of Psalm 22 grounded in their socio-political and religious experience are empowered in a way that works towards their liberation.

#### **10.4 Conclusion**

We began this chapter with an explanation on the descriptive and constructive use of Psalm 22. It was noted that there cannot be any pure descriptive function of a biblical text. It was argued that the text becomes alive when used with a constructive function in the sense of a biblical text fusing with a contemporary context. In this chapter we examined Psalm 22 in the light of a conversation between non-Dalit and Dalit interpretations. It is demonstrated that some of the interpretative mechanisms like: Christological (various aspects of Christology), literal, allegorical and metaphorical ways of dealing with the psalm can be noticed in all Dalit and non-Dalit interpretations of Psalm 22. Moreover lament and thanksgiving as unifying themes in the psalm seems to have been present in all the different interpretations of the psalm. These themes are further related to the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ in some of the interpretations beginning with the New Testament. In the over all conversation among different interpretations of the psalm it was pointed out that the performance and function of the psalm is radically transformed when the individual of the psalm is taken as Jesus, Queen Esther and Dalit woman. It is also demonstrated that the Dalit and non-Dalit interpretations on Psalm 22 share common interpretative mechanisms even when the outcome in each case was different. The converging factor between the two interpretations is that in both cases Psalm 22 is interpreted with particular contextual needs. The non-Dalit interpreters on Psalm 22 helped Dalit interpretations to an extent that Dalit Christians reading of the psalm is enhanced and enriched by standing in its rich tradition of the history of interpretation.

It is now clear that Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22, while sharing much in common with other interpreters we discussed in this thesis, is unique in terms of offering some features that are not discussed among its non-Dalit partners. Their context and method of interpreting the psalm are different and this helps them to see the psalm in a way that is not found among its dialogue partners. As already pointed out for Dalit

Christians Psalm 22 is meaningful and relevant as they face life threatening situations of caste and other forms of oppression. The interpretation of the psalm not only helps Dalit Christians in finding a situation of solidarity with the words of the psalmist but also expresses their anger and protest against the very oppressive system they are forced to live with. In this process Dalit Christians come up with some hermeneutical models that may guide their ongoing interpretative process. The interpretative models suggested based on a Dalit application of the psalm is emerging out of their socio- economic, political and religious situation.



## GENERAL CONCLUSION

In this thesis we have endeavoured to place Dalit Christian interpretations of Psalm 22 in conversation with western Christian and Early Christian interpretations. In this process we have sought to identify common interpretative modes and features among them and at the same time highlight the distinctive features of a Dalit Christian interpretation. In the Indian context in the last two centuries biblical interpretation was predominantly based on the western mode of historical critical method. Even after the last two centuries of Indian Christian theological enterprise, which was mostly high caste, it was still thought that the western dominated historical critical method of understanding the Bible was “the correct method” of understanding a biblical text. This is primarily because the seminary and theological education was western. In order to challenge this situation we have undertaken to look at the Christian Dalit interpretations based on Psalm 22 to put it in dialogue with western historical critical and Early Christian interpretations so as to show how it shares as well as differs from these interpretations. It was demonstrated that even when Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22 shares much in common with its dialogue partners, it differs at certain points not only because of difference in context and method, but because of its genuine commitment to the message of the Bible as a practical guide in their life threatening situations.

It was argued that the context, setting and structure of Psalm 22 had tremendous potential to express the themes of lament and thanksgiving in its two discrete parts. The psalmist could express the movement between lament and thanksgiving in a poetic structure containing transitional marker, carry over themes, and repetition of vocabulary. It was noted in chapter 2 that the themes of lament and praise, suffering and celebration may be seen as one arc of unity in the psalm and one is not understood without the other. For Dalit Christians this sort of structural and thematic unity of the psalm is of paramount importance as they read and appropriate the psalm in the light of their situation. Moreover the presence of metaphorical language in the psalm is another feature that is useful for Dalits to read the psalm as their own. Similarly ascribing the psalm to David is yet another element Dalits used to

appropriate the psalm to their own context. Thus Dalits have benefited from the historical critical features of the psalm in ways that we pointed out above.

When Psalm 22 was used by the New Testament writers its function had already changed. The psalm was interpreted in the context of the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus died as the mocked and rejected one, as suffering messiah; his suffering as the righteous and vindicated person is one of the purposes for which the psalm was used in the New Testament. At the same time the psalm was looked at in terms of the prophecy of David about the passion and resurrection of Christ. For this purpose Dalit Christians used certain textual suggestions related to the individual verses of the psalm (verse 17c) as pointers to appropriate it to David's situation and its subsequent application to the passion of Jesus Christ. These aspects in the New Testament use of the psalm are helpful for Dalits as they see their situation in the light of the psalm via the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As noted in chapter 3 the use of the psalm in the New Testament also reveals that the passion and resurrection has become one concrete example and such contexts of distress and deliverance may be found in other places. In this light the Dalit Christian context becomes another concrete example for appropriating the potential meaning and use of the psalm.

Early Christian interpreters exploited the message of Psalm 22 with the view that it addresses the needs of their time. They interpreted the psalm as a prophecy of David about the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Theodoret viewed the content of the psalm in the light of David's life, but relaxed his position as a strict literalist to accommodate Christological reading. For this purpose he interpreted the metaphors in the psalm in connection with the religious leaders of Jesus' ministry and Jews in relation to Gentiles. Obviously, Theodoret was concerned about the heresies of his diocese in his admonition to Jews. Augustine, in addition to his Christological interpretation allegorizes the content of the psalm in relation to the universal church, Jewish nation, and Synagogue. He used the psalm as a platform for a contextualized polemic to counter Donatists. Against Donatists Augustine defended his claim of a universal Church rather than Church limited to Africa alone. As noted in chapter 4 Augustine depicts the human suffering of Jesus as an outcast and scorn of the people among whom he lived. This depiction of Jesus certainly agrees with the Dalit view of

Jesus as the human sufferer who can express his solidarity with them. The Early Christian interpreter's use of metaphors and the way in which they allegorized certain words in the psalm stand as a close parallel to Dalit Christian interpretation in the overall interpretative trends of the psalm. As pointed out in chapter 4 although we see certain specific nuances in both the Early Christian and Dalit use of metaphors and allegorization, Theodoret and Augustine's mode of interpretation fits well with Dalit reading of the psalm. Dalits allegorized and used metaphors in connection with their oppressors and reflect on the psalm based on their local issues of caste and other problems in their Church situation. In this sense Early Christian and Dalit interpretations come closer in exploiting the metaphors and images in Psalm 22.

Delitzsch and Menn as western critical scholars interpret Psalm 22 in connection with an interest in Jewish-Christian relations. We have noted that Delitzsch was mainly interested in the Jewish conversion to Christianity. Contrary to Delitzsch Menn was interested to articulate Jewish-Christian dialogue in her treatment of Psalm 22. However both writers come close at several points to the Dalit interpretation of the psalm. This can be seen by looking at the psalm in terms of its subsequent 'fulfilment' or application to other contexts of distress and deliverance. As noted in chapter 5 David as the petitioning author of the psalm is significant for Delitzsch and Menn. This point is extremely important in the Dalit interpretation as they see the life of David reflected in the psalm. As pointed out by the two scholars the performance of the psalm radically changes once it is understood in the light of the passion and resurrection of Jesus. Moreover the way the biblical figure Esther as described in *Midrash Tehillim*, appropriating the psalm to describe her duress, is an indication of how the psalm's potential is exploited in describing the distress and deliverance of an individual in her community. The two scholars are unanimous in expressing the point that David, Jesus and Esther (Esther in relation to Psalm 22 is only treated by Menn) are clear case studies for exploiting the inherent potential of the psalm in a way that shows that suffering can be experienced, articulated and eventually healed. These cases studies have the capacity to inform the suffering of countless individuals in their community whose stories can be reflected using Psalm 22. On this count Dalit Christian interpretation is another case study through which the pain, agony, distress, joy and deliverance is articulated. Thus Delitzsch and

Menn's treatment of the psalm is very helpful for Dalit reading of the psalm. At the same time Delitzsch and Menn have not dealt with the theme of social suffering emerging out of the psalm and this theme is fully exploited by the Dalit Christians in their interpretation.

Dalit Christian context was unique in several respects in comparison with their dialogue partners. As noted in chapter 1 Dalit Christian interpretations on Psalm 22 are derived from their authentic day to day experiences in the church and society. Dalits integrate their preaching and reflections on Psalm 22 based on their everyday life situations. For Dalits the Bible (and Psalm 22) is integral to daily life. As demonstrated in chapters 7-9 Dalit Christians read Psalm 22 in the light of their real life experiences of socio-economic and religious problems. For them Psalm 22 is made alive and real once they see it in the light of their life struggles. For this reason each of their sermons and reflections we used on Psalm 22 is a valuable resource that communicates their life of struggle and hope towards God's act of liberation.

Dalit Christians work under the influence of a rigid caste system, and karma theory, legitimized by the Hindu scriptures. Working under the religious and theological climate of the colonial mission impact, nineteenth-twentieth century Indian Christian theology, Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22 emerged as a distinct point of view that speaks for their needs. As noted in chapter 7 Dalit Christians although subjected to the pervasive influence of karma are against its imposition on them because they affirm that in Jesus Christ their karma is removed. Even the twentieth century Indian Christian theologian Vengal Chakkarai supports this view. Dalits increasingly find their solidarity in the human identity of Jesus as against the exalted power of Christ emphasized by the fellow non-Dalit Indian theologians. It was noted in chapter 7 that even while much of the non-Dalit contribution to the interpretation of Psalm 22 (of Chakkarai) is not useful certain features of the interpretation dealing with: divine power of Christ on the cross and his kenosis experience supplement Dalit reading of the psalm.

Dalit women views stand as a distinct category in the interpretation of Psalm 22. It demonstrates that their interpretation of the Bible is grounded in their authentic and real experiences. It was noted in chapter 8 that Dalit Christian women, faced with

harsh realities of caste, class and gender discriminations find increasing affinity with a biblical text like Psalm 22 as it resonates with their condition and it generates a profound hope that God is able to redeem them from their present perils. Through the lament genre they not only find comfort and solace, but also register their protest against their oppressor and God. Through this genuine protest against their God they seek his intervention to punish their oppressor and vindicate their just cause. Through the cross and resurrection they find solidarity and identity in the broken yet victorious life of Christ.

Dalit Christian interpretation of Psalm 22 is profoundly Christological. Jesus' cry of dereliction, mockery and insult on the cross are some of the crucial features with which Dalit Christians read the content of the psalm. The suffering Servant model of Christ and his dalitness on the cross help the Dalits to declare him as Dalit God. As pointed out in chapter 9 (in the case of Dalit women in chapter 8) Dalits do not passively internalize their suffering as God-given. Instead they find the cry of abandonment in the psalm and of Jesus' dereliction on the cross as a cry of protest. Protest is a genuine dialogue between them and God; to plead with God that their just cause may be vindicated and the oppressor punished. As already noted the use of the drum as a symbol of resistance and emancipation by the Paraiyars of south India is a case in point to view how Dalit Christians affirm their Dalit identity as against their high caste oppressors.

As already pointed out in chapter 10 conversation between the non-Dalit and Dalit interpretations concerning Psalm 22 are carried out with a twin purpose. On the one hand it was demonstrated that Dalit interpretation shares much in common with its non-Dalit partners in the process of interpretation of Psalm 22. On the other hand it was also demonstrated that Dalit interpretation comes up with some fresh insights that are not found in its dialogue partners. Working under the influence of western biblical and theological interpretation on the one hand and in the context of Hindu scriptures, karma, caste system, and high caste Indian Christian theology of nineteenth century on the other hand Dalit Christian interpretation of Psalm 22 has both shared certain common features and expresses its distinctiveness in its interpretation.



As noted in chapter 10 in the process of genuine conversation between the Dalit and non-Dalit interpretations certain common converging features emerge. The psalm structured as two discrete parts with lament and praise sections are well knit together by its poetic description of carryover themes, repetition of vocabulary etc. This feature fits a common trend in most of the interpretations of the psalm beginning with the historical critical exploration of the psalm discussed in chapter 2.

Christological reading of the psalm is a very common trend in most western and Early Christian interpretations. The suffering and deliverance motifs found in the psalm are concretized in the passion and resurrection of Christ. The performance of the psalm radically changes once it is seen as the psalm of Christ's passion and resurrection. In this connection the New Testament usage of the psalm is very crucial for Dalit reading. The interpretation of the psalm based on literal, metaphorical, allegorical methods is another converging point between Dalit and non-Dalit interpretations. These features although exhibiting specific interpretative nuances, nevertheless seem to converge at several points. As already noted the use of Psalm 22 in *Midrash Tehillim* in connection with Queen Esther's duress directly relates to the situation of Dalit women's struggle and hope. The issue of David as petitioning author of the psalm is an important point that takes specific direction in understanding the content of the psalm in both Dalit and non-Dalit interpretations. Dalits have made use of this as a key point to articulate their suffering and deliverance. Dalits made David-Jesus as their interpretative mechanism through which their distress and deliverance can be articulated.

As pointed out in chapter 10 Dalit Christian interpretation works in conversation with its non-Dalit partners while interpreting Psalm 22. For Dalits the structural and thematic division of the psalm is of paramount importance. On the one hand they see the reality of suffering in the language of the psalm and on the other hand the transition between lament and thanksgiving is a hopeful element they can see in the psalm. This transition shows God's vindication for their cause. They no longer make a meaningless cry since God's liberation is sure in their lives. Jesus as righteous and vindicated suffering Messiah and Servant is the exact model Dalits adopt from their New Testament understanding of Psalm 22. Like the Early Christian interpreters Dalit Christians appropriate the psalm in the light of their particular ecclesiastical



problems. Even while the metaphor like “worms” is not understood with the same nuance, nevertheless it serves as a point to derive the meaning they wanted. Christ as the redeemer of the entire world is also a common factor on which both Dalit and Early Christian interpretations share a common platform. As noted in chapters 4 and 10 Augustine’s interpretation of the psalm in relation to Apostle Thomas putting his hand in Jesus’ wounds and scars provide a case of improvised reading and this insight shares with Dalit reading of the psalm. As noted above Delitzsch and Menn’s interpretation of the psalm fits well with Dalit reading because both these western scholars see the potential of the psalm in its subsequent ‘fulfilment’ and application. David-Jesus and Esther are some exemplary figures whose stories of distress and deliverance resonate with the content of the psalm. In this sense the Dalit story of suffering and deliverance agrees with the content of the psalm. Thus Dalit interpretations share few common and some specific interpretative mechanisms with their non-Dalit partners. In this sense their interpretations emerge out of the common interpretative tradition of Psalm 22. Dalit interpretations, as we discovered, stand closely in relation to its dialogue partners.

Dalit interpretation, in spite of sharing much in common with its non-Dalit partners differs at certain points in its interpretation of Psalm 22. As noted in chapter 10 the distinctive features of Dalit reading comes not only because of difference in context but also because of a deep commitment to the Bible as a guide to their struggles in the world. Unlike some of the dominant western and Early Church interpretations for Dalits the lament motif of the psalm is vital because it provides them with an opportunity to cry, express pain and the distress of their present pathos and relate the same pathos to the pathos of the psalmist and Jesus Christ. At the same time lament helps them to raise a few existential questions to God and to seek the justice that is denied to them. Even while interpreting the psalm in the light of the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Dalit Christians highlight certain features of Christology that are not found among its non-Dalit interpreters. Christ as the redeemer from the bondage of karma is one profound meaning they discovered from the psalm. The human identity of Jesus is another because it helps Dalits to find their solidarity in a God who suffers with them. Dalit women’s view of Jesus affirms the same theme as

they struggle with different kinds of marginalization. In none of the non-Dalit interpretations do these features surface so clearly and concretely.

Dalit interpretation of Psalm 22 demonstrates that their hermeneutical quest stands in relation to their daily life struggle. The biblical message comes to them alive as they face humiliation and distress. At the same time Dalits find God's liberation and transformation experience in the reading of the psalm. They now affirm that their cry is not meaningless but with full of promise and hope that God will bring about change in their distressed lives. Thus they can protest against their oppressor and get involved in a positive action to experience God's liberative action. By reading the psalm in their interpretative context Dalits are now aware that they are given identity as God's children and are no more subjected to the oppressive systems of caste and karma. The interpretation of Psalm 22 empowers Dalit Christians in such a way that they no longer internalize their suffering but find God's strength to fight against their oppressor. For this religious empowerment Psalm 22 served as a catalyst.

To conclude, Dalit interpretation of the psalm challenges its non-Dalit partners to understand the psalm amidst the struggles, aspirations and hope of everyday Dalit life. Biblical text for them is not simply a literary piece as was the case for some of its non-Dalit interpreters. Dalits consider the Bible as a living book that moves beyond its historical and literary domains as they find resonance with the human emotions, the pain and anguish caused by their oppressors and at the same time the experience of deliverance in a God who vindicates their cause to punish their oppressors. Dalit interpretation challenge and enrich its non-Dalit partners in such a way that they too interpret the Bible to engage with its interpretative community in an analogous way to the case of Dalits.

Even while using certain interpretive modes from their non-Dalit partners, Dalit interpretation enriches and challenges their partners in that they do have a unique meaning emerging out of the psalm and they can find a rightful place in the history of interpretation of Psalm 22 by providing a new interpretative delirium.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Yvonne Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and its afterlives: The survival of Jonah in Western culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 292.

## Appendix – A

### Table Showing the Socio-economic and Religious Background of Dalit Congregations/Groups

Text, Comm. date	Preacher, context and total number present at the meeting	Socio-economic background of the people	Sex and age group of the people	Religious background of the people	Other information
<b>Text and Commentary 1</b> - 24 <sup>th</sup> Oct, 2004 Emmanuel Full Gospel Church, Kamarajapuram, Tambaram, Tamilnadu	Rev. Robertraj, Sunday service. 200 members present.	Poor and middle class Dalit Christians from Parayah caste. Out of 200 members 180 are Dalits 15 are from Nadar caste, one Thevar, one Goundar and three from Brahmin caste.	Male-70; Female-130. Young people consist of 20% of which 10% male and female are equally divided. Age group between 3 and 70.	Nearly 150 members are Christians from previous generation. Other members are either recently converted or newly joined.	Majority are Dalit Christians and typical semi urban congregation. Belief in fatal view of suffering is found.
<b>Text and Commentary 2</b> - 31st Oct, 2004 Craig Emmanuel Baptist Church, Kakinada, East Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh.	Mrs. Sarah Navaroji Rajkumar, Sunday Youth meeting. 15 Young people present.	Poor and middle class Dalit Christians belonging to Mala and Madiga community.	Male-6 and Female-9 between the age group of 17-25.	All of them belong to third generation Christians.	Focused group of young Dalit Christians educated in a town and rural setting.
<b>Text and Commentary 3</b> - 2nd Nov, 2004 Craig Emmanuel Baptist Church, Kakinada.	Mr. John Victor. Weekly men's prayer meeting. 10 men present.	Middle and poor class Mala and Madiga Christians	All male between 35-70 of age.	Second and third generation Christians	Most of the members are in the Church leadership and are well equipped in the Bible knowledge.
<b>Text and Commentary 4</b> - 4th Nov, 2004 Craig Emmanuel Baptist Church, Kakinada.	Mr. B. V. Rajamannar. Weekly women's cottage prayer meeting. 15 Dalit women and 5 non - Dalit women were present.	Poor, middle and upper middle class women belonging to Mala, Madiga, Khamma and Reddy caste groups.	All female except the preacher aged between 30-65.	Most of them belonging to third generation Christians. Among five non Dalit women all of them are converts with in the last ten years.	No discrimination of sex and thus wanted to invite a male preacher. Very free to discuss the issues.
<b>Text and Commentary 5</b> - 5th Nov, 2004 Craig Emmanuel Baptist Church, Kakinada.	Mrs. Estheramma John Paul. Weekly women's fasting prayer meeting. 15 women present.	Poor, middle and upper middle class women belonging to Mala, Madiga and Brahmin caste.	All female aged between 30-65.	Most of them belong to third generation Christians. Two Brahmin women converted from Hinduism are attending this meeting since one year.	Lament and hope are seen as strong points of their affinity with the present and the psalm. Very moving prayers for Dalit women and others in need.
<b>Text 6</b> - 7 <sup>th</sup> Nov, 2004 Craig Emmanuel Baptist	Rev. T. Punnaiah. Sunday service. 350	Poor, middle and upper middle class	Male-150, Female-200 Out of this 20%	Nearly 310 members are Dalit	Majority are Dalit Christians with

Church, Kakinada.	members present.	belonging to Mala, Madiga, Khamma, Reddy and Brahmin caste groups.	is youth between 17-25 age; 50% between 26-40 age and the remaining between 41-75 age.	Christians (Mala and Madigas) and among the remaining ones are Khammas, Reddys and Brahmins converted in the last ten years.	town setting.
<b>Reflections and Commentary 6</b> - 14 <sup>th</sup> Nov, 2004 Good News Methodist Church, Bangarapet, Kolar District, Karnataka.	Seven Short reflections on Psalm 22. They are done by four men and three women. They are Rev. Maria Susai, Messrs James, Pandian and Vasudevan. Three women: Latha, Jayamma, and Mary. This is usual Sunday Bible study group meeting after the main Sunday service.	Poor Dalit men and women belonging to Parayah caste.	Male-4 including pastor and Female-3. All of them are from Parayah caste group aged between 25-45.	Out of four men three of them are converts from Hinduism inclusive of pastor and other one is third generation Christian. All three women are converts in the span of last three years.	Very much committed to Dalit and Christian cause. They also believe in karma theory of Hinduism as cause for their present suffering. Most of them are subjected to healing and some supernatural miracles to embrace Christianity.
<b>Text and Commentary 7</b> - 21 <sup>st</sup> Nov, 2004 CSI St. Andrews Church, Kolar Gold Fields, Kolar District, Karnataka.	Rev. Soundaraj. Sunday service. 100 members present.	Poor and middle class Dalits belonging to Parayah community.	Male-40; Female-60. The age group is between 5 and 60. 25% of the congregation are young people between 18-25.	All of them are second and third generation Christians. All of them are Dalits belonging to Parayah caste.	Struggling with local problems of caste discrimination, poverty and unemployment.
<b>Text and Commentary 8</b> - 25 <sup>th</sup> Nov, 2004 United theological College chapel, Bangalore city.	Student preachers: Messrs Ratnaraj, Punitaraj, Stanish, Ratnakar, John, Joshua Das, and Ms Ruth, Ms. Thavaseeli. These are occasional student gatherings to listen and deliberate current issues. 30 members present including the preachers.	Poor and middle class Dalit students of theology.	Male-25 and Female-5. All of them are in the age group of 23-35.	All of them are Dalits belonging to different sub castes. All of them are third generation Christians.	Lively group with theological background. Most of them have already completed a 10 week introductory course on Dalit Theology.
<b>Text and Commentary 9</b> - 28 <sup>th</sup> Nov, 2004 Madras Telugu Baptist Church, Vepery, Madras city, Tamilnadu.	Rev. S. Rajendra Prasad. Sunday morning service. 350 members present.	Poor, middle and some upper middle class Dalits and caste people.	Male 150; Female 200. 25% are in the youth group between 17-30 years. Out of 350 nearly 300 are Madiga Christians, 15 are Mala Christians. Rest belong to Khamma, Reddy and Brahmin caste groups.	All the Madiga and Mala Christians are third generation Christians. Among other caste groups several of them are converts in the span of last five years.	Very much a floating congregation, yet it is predominantly Madiga Christian congregation.
<b>Text and Commentary 10</b> - 28 <sup>th</sup> Nov, 2004 Pilgrim Lutheran Church,	Mrs. Catherine Vadivambal and Mrs. Manohari Sugirthamani. Usual women's fellowship	Poor, middle and upper middle class women are	All 15 are female. 5 are from non Dalit background belonging to	All of them are second and third generation	Very much committed to the cause of poor and oppressed Dalit women in and out

Nungambakkam, Madras, Tamilnadu.	meeting on Sunday evening. 15 women present.	present.	Vellala and Nadar Christians and other are from Parayah caste including the preachers.	Christians.	side the Church.
<b>Text and Commentary 11 -</b> 5 <sup>th</sup> Dec, 2004 Garden Rock Church, Vengamukkapalem, Ongole, Prakasham district, Andhra Pradesh.	Rev.Balakrishna. Usual Sunday morning service.150 members present.	Poor class Dalit Christians.	Out of 150 100 are female and rest male. 20% are in youth group between 15-25.	All of them are exclusively Dalit Christians belonging to Madiga and very few Mala (5%) Christians. All of them belong to second and third generation Christians.	Typical rural Dalit Christian congregation. Dalit oppression is faced by this group in the rhythm of daily life. Belief in fatalistic view of suffering is seen in some members.

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